

**NO. 7**  
**SUMMER Issue**

# Science Fiction

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# QUARTERLY

**TWO NEW NOVELS!**

**THE GREAT MIRROR**

by **ARTHUR J. BURKS**

**STARSTONE WORLD**

by **HANNES BOK**



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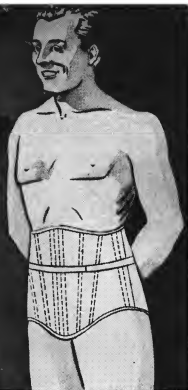
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Summer  
1942

# Science Fiction QUARTERLY

## TWO NEW COMPLETE NOVELS

### *Science Fiction*

#### THE GREAT MIRROR ..... Arthur J. Burks 4

Out of the heart of Tibet came the summons to an American archaeologist, a call that was to plunge him into fantastic conflict with another world. For the people of the High Lama had stolen a thing valuable beyond price to Mars and the Martians were determined to punish Earth and its inhabitants!

### *Fantasy Fiction*

#### STARSTONE WORLD ..... Hannes Bok 88

The science of this far land was so strange as to border upon witchcraft, even though the man, trapped in an alien body, knew that all that happened was due to natural laws, weird as they may be in this world. And his quest to find a way back to the Earth he could not forget led through the grim fire-tunnels to—Sula, mistress of the starstone!

## THREE OUTSTANDING NEW SHORT TALES

#### UP THERE ..... Martin Pearson 85

Which is more fantastic: the theory that the stars are incredibly distant, or that they are very close to a stationary Earth?

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He thought he could influence the future by shooting this man in, to him, the far past. It worked—he did influence the future!

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Something about that pitiful body on the beach looked familiar. . . .

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Cover by John B. Mussachia from a scene in "Starstone World"

By Hannes Bok.

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*A sheet of flame appeared—*

# THE GREAT MIRROR

Illustrated by John B. Musacchia

Into the secret heart of Tibet, whence no foreigner had before penetrated, he was taken to serve in the strangest conflict ever known. For over, not only Tibet, but all Earth hung the menace of outraged Mars and the shadow of terrible but just retribution!

**AN OUTSTANDING NEW NOVEL BY ONE OF**





*rising up before the horsemen*

BY **ARTHUR J. BURKS**

(Author of "Earth, the Marauder", "Survival", etc.)

**A** RATTLE of rifle shots came out of the miles-high high pall of red dust which blanketed the vast expanse of the Gobi. Our Chinese workmen uttered weird cries and stopped their work in the pit, jumped to their rifles. A surge of terror went

**SCIENCE FICTION'S OLD GUARD FAVORITES.**

through me, for Martin Funston, leader of the expedition, had left two days before for Urga on business connected with our expedition, and I was in command of the outfit, a job for which I was enough fitted so long as there was no interference.

This business of rifle shots was certainly in the nature of interference, and the coolies looked to me for leadership. I heard my *Compradore* cry out:

"*Mongu jen! Mongu jen! Mongols! Mongols!*"

But I knew too much about the peoples near the roof of the world to think for an instant that whoever fired on us were Mongols. Mongols didn't work that way.

Tibetans, however, invariably introduced themselves by firing on strangers. And yet, how could there be Tibetans in the Gobi? Funston had said no when, just before his departure, I had said to him:

"You're quite sure we're not inside the borders of Tibet? It seems to me, if I know anything about maps, that we're dangerously close to the borders of Ngolokwa. And the Ngoloks are the savages of the Tibetan tribes, inclined to shoot first and ask questions afterward." I knew something about Tibetans: two years before, I had spent some time in that wild, mysterious country, with another expedition, in exactly the same capacity as my present one: official photographer for the Geographic Research Society. There was one difference only, in this expedition; we were here in the Gobi because Funston was sure in his own mind that here somewhere we would find the cradle of the human race. There would be fossils for me to photograph, piecemeal as found, and as a whole when Funston and his experts had assembled them. Mat-

ter of fact, he had gone to Urga to meet some of his experts and bring them out to the diggings.

"*Mongu jen! Mongu jen!*"

The cries of the Chinese were filled with terror. They were traditionally afraid of Mongols. But I dared not tell them that these attackers were Tibetans, Ngolok tribesmen, for their terror would have numbed their hands so that they couldn't have worked the bolts of the rifles we had taught them to us.

I hurried to the side of Hsung Chun, my *compradore*, or foreman. He spoke some English and understood a lot more than he was willing for anyone to know.

"Tell your men," I said to him, far more calmly than I really felt, "not to shoot to kill, or even to maim. Tell them to fire over the heads of those people, but plenty close, understand?"

"But they catchee shoot to kill!" said Hsung.

I called his attention to the obvious fact that while scores of bullets had come extremely close to us, none had struck down any of our men, or even our animals—though the animals were in wild disorder, pulling at their tether, threatening to break loose and stampede into the red dust.

"They're not enemies until they've killed someone," I said, afraid to say more for fear that he would realize, as I did, that the oncoming mounted men were Tibetans. This business of firing was their way of saying howdy. Hsung barked to his men in Pekingese, and our rifles spoke sharply, a veritable volley. I looked over the rim of the pit in which we were working, and saw the eerie shadows, far out in the dust, pull their wiry animals to a halt. There

must have been two-score of them. And they were milling about, obviously holding a conference — the usual Tibetan habit when strangers return the “greeting” of hot lead. They had killed none of us, we had killed none of them, therefore it was quite possible we could be friends. It was more or less up to us. If we couldn’t take a joke . . .

**B**UT Tibetan jokes could be serious, as I very well know, since myself and one other man—now a mental wreck in an American hospital—had been the only survivors of that Tibetan expedition of two years ago. And that expedition had been careful to stay clear of Ngolokwa!

“Tell the men to cease firing, Hsung,” I said. “But post them about the diggings in such a way that they can fire on those people if they get out of hand.”

Our own firing ceased as Hsung shouted. I stared at the queer forms out there in the red dust. Red dust! It was the bane of existence of those who live anywhere near the Gobi. When the great winds sweep across the Gobi, all of China directly southward from the desert suffers from the dust. No house can be secured against the filtering of the plague. During those storms, even ships far out in the Yellow Sea become coated with the dust, which smears the decks and works through closed ports into the clothing of passengers.

And here we were in the very thick of it.

“Davies, *hsien sheng*,” said Hsung. “My catchee think this no belong good, us go let these *Mongu jen* come into camp.”

My name is Howard Davies—not that it particularly matters. At least not that I *thought* it mattered then. Tibetans could have no possible in-

terest in me personally. I was just a gangling, six foot two, one hundred and fifty pound camera crank, with a yen for wild adventure. The affair of two years ago. . . .

But it hadn’t happened here. These Ngoloks — I was sure that’s what they were—were simply out for loot, attacking us through the storm because they knew no Mongols would be out in the appalling red dust to prevent their crossing the border.

And now they were approaching, a big man on a horse that looked to be white, leading them. They had fanned out to right and left of this man, and I was a little afraid that they planned an encircling movement, or a direct charge, though that wasn’t usually the Tibetan way. It might be, though, if they knew the weakness of our force, and the fear which filled my men at sight of them.

The Ngoloks must not know our situation. That left it up to me. I must go out and parley with them. I never hated to do anything so much in all my life, but it was either that or be wiped out completely. And for the life of me I couldn’t understand why I took my prize camera with me. It was just a hunch, maybe. I put aside my rifle, stepped out of the pit, and moved into the dust to meet the Ngoloks, first telling Hsung to guard against surprise, and to order every man to fire if any tricks were played on me.

A strange exhilaration went with me on that march to meet what might be death. The Ngoloks had always intrigued me, more than any other Tibetans. Maybe that’s why I took the camera, if I had any real reason; I wanted to snap pictures of a people rarely if ever photographed.

Also, I wondered if they would think it odd that I had an unusual command of their language.

AS I started walking, the Tibetans lashed their horses into a trot, which didn't help my peace of mind any. They could so easily run me down. It was then that I saw something like a pennant, held aloft by the leader of the Ngoloks, and knew that they were going to make at least a pretense of amity. The pennant was a *Kadakh*, a symbol of friendship.

But showing a confidence I did not really feel, I stopped and held up my hand commandingly. The horsemen reined into a slow walk, and the leader rode out to meet me. Even through the veil of red dust which choked the nostrils and filled the lungs, I could see the face of the leader. There was ferocity in it, fearlessness, ruthlessness. The man was imperious, contemptuous of all lesser mortals. I was sure in that instance that the *Kadakh* was an afterthought, which might well spell treachery. Tibetans will pull deadly tricks and regard their victim as a poor sport if he gets upset about them!

When the leader of the outfit was within twenty paces of me I signaled again. He reined in. Then I motioned him to dismount and come forward afoot. No Tibetan likes this, either, for Tibetans will not walk if they can possibly ride. However, with some hesitation, he obeyed. His horse, reins dropped over head, stood like a western cow-pony, as though tied to the ground. The Tibetan, a man well over six feet in height, and twice as broad through the shoulders as myself, marched to meet me. The *Kadakh*—a rich piece of red satin with a blue border—was lying across his outstretched palms. This was the traditional method of presenting the *Kadakh*. And I had always thought that the *Kadakh*

could so easily cover a pistol which could pump a bullet into the belly of the would be recipient. The Tibetan inclined his head a little, and stuck out his furry tongue. The tongue was a long one, the end of it coming down to the tip of his chin. The *Kadakh* in the upturned palms and the protruding tongue meant,

"No evil on my tongue, no weapons in my hands."

I had no *Kadakh*. I had only the camera. But we had a basis for negotiations. The Tibetan came close enough for me to extend my palms, which he could see held no weapon, and receive the *Kadakh*. I had slung my camera over my shoulder.

"You are Howard Davies?" said the Tibetan, to my utter amazement. Not in English, but in Tibetan, with the Tibetan rendition of my name.

"Yes," I said shortly, not knowing just what to do with the *Kadakh* on my palms at this juncture, and ignoring it for the moment. "I am Howard Davies. Who are you? What do you want? How dare you cross the border into Mongolia?"

He smiled and answered, "I am Wann Ta Chih, leader of the Ngoloks in this area. I come to make friends, and to speak of the Mirror from Outside. As to the border, there has always been some question as to just where it runs. You say, perhaps, and the Mongols say, that this is Mongol territory. I say it is part of Ngolokwa."

"I know nothing of border disputes," I said. Which was a mistake, because it showed him that I myself did not know where the border ran—and, insofar, placed me at his mercy. He could be sure of himself, and I could not.

"Then," he said, imperiously, "you

are scarcely in position to demand explanations, are you?"

"I can still ask what you mean about the Mirror from Outside, can't I? And how it could possibly interest me?"

"You speak Tibetan," he said calmly. "You know my country and my people. Besides that, you know the people of the world outside, which is far more important."

I was thoroughly mystified, and a frown crossed my forehead in spite of myself. I looked away from Wanu Ta Chih. I looked down at the *Kadakh*, conscious for the first time that there was something most unusual about it — just as there was something about this Tibetan I could not exactly place. He was, obviously, a leader of bandits, for the Ngoloks lived by banditry. Yet the Tibetan he spoke was the Tibetan of the highly educated lamas. And he knew of my connection, certainly, with the expedition of two years ago. How else could he have known so much about me? I'd have sworn none of my men was a traitor, for none of them would have contacted the Ngoloks for all the good in Tibet.

But, the *Kadakh*.

It was more than just a piece of cloth. It was heavy as a piece of chain mail, and though it looked to be satin, there was a squirmy, almost snaky quality about it. The thing, writhing on my palms whenever I so much as breathed, seemed to be alive with a baleful, unearthly aliveness that gave me the shivers. In order not to show my feelings, my growing uneasiness, I reverted back to the Mirror, which meant absolutely nothing to me.

"What is this Mirror from Outside?" I said.

**H**IS answer was strange indeed. He raised his head as though he were scanning the heavens—though through that pall of red dust one couldn't see fifty feet in the air. We all almost swam in the red dust.

"It came from Outside," he said simply. "From outside the earth. From another earth. There is trouble about it. Tibet needs the help of your world."

"Look," I said testily, "I know a lot about your mystical stuff. I know your people use telepathy. I know the high lamas can, or claim they can, project their astral entities halfway around the world: I know you claim to be able to levitate yourselves. . . ."

"We do all those things," he interrupted.

"Suppose you do?" I retorted. "You can't levitate yourself to the Moon, or Jupiter, or Mars, can you?"

He nodded — again to my utter amazement. I was sure he was pulling my leg—some Tibetan idea of a great joke.

"The Mirror," he stated flatly, "comes from Mars. We brought it away from Mars three months ago, on the occasion of our first visit to that planet."

I had lost patience. I had taken all the nonsense I was going to from this Ngolok bandit.

"I suggest," I said, "that you take back your *Kadakh*, and take yourselves back across the border to wherever you came from. I am too busy a man to be annoyed by Tibetan riddles."

"We'll go," he said quietly, "but you must come with us."

I guess my mouth must have flopped open like that of a gaffed fish. He grinned at me. His eyes, cold they were, danced with a kind of macabre merriment.

"I've no time to go anywhere," I said.

"You will come with us," he repeated.

"No!" I held out the *Kadakh* on my palms. I knew that to return it was an insult, but I did it any way. Wann Ta Chih seemed not to take offense at all. He extended his palms for the strange, writhing piece of cloth. His horny, rough hands touched mine. In the instant they did it was as though I had been sucked into a vortex beyond description. It was as though the atoms of my body were disintegrating, flying apart, exploding me into bits—though there was no sensation of pain. Just a swift fading out of everything I knew. Of Wann Ta Chih, of his bandit gang, of the red dust, of the Gobi itself. One thing I noticed, just as Wann Ta Chih touched the *Kadakh*, uncovering my hands, was the time indicated by my wrist-watch. It was three-fifteen in the afternoon. The date, for the sake of the record, was November 27, 1940.

**W**HEN I regained consciousness I still stood with my hands touching the *Kadakh*. The man across the writhing cloth from me was not Wann Ta Chih, but a Tibetan lama of the Yellow Hats, and he was gravely smiling. My hands were still uncovered, or almost uncovered, as though the lama were taking the *Kadakh* from me, as Wann Ta Chih had been. So, I looked at my watch. The time was three-sixteen!

But I had been in this room almost two years ago, and recognized it instantly as the visitors' room of the Lamasery of Godrang! I knew, as I held my breath with amazement, that Godrang was over six hundred

miles from our diggings in the Gobi! What nonsense was this, anyway? Had I been unconscious all the time it had taken whoever had knocked me cold, to bring me to Godrang, a journey of several days on horse-back?

"What is the date, Father," I asked horsely.

"November 27, 1940," he said mockingly, deliberately using the western calendar I knew. He looked down at my watch, went on: "It is three-seventeen in the afternoon!"

If he spoke the truth I had been six hundred miles and more distant from here, two minutes before! And most of those two minutes had been spent right here in Godrang. To say that I was taken aback is a miracle of understatement.

I could have come no faster on a radio wave!

"In the name of your Living Buddha, Father," I said desperately, "I insist on the truth!"

He straightened slightly, proudly.

"It is my habit to tell the truth always," he said.

There was just one thing I wanted in that instant: *out!* I knew better than to offer violence to any lama. But I jerked away from the *Kadakh* as though it had really been a poisonous reptile, hurled myself past the lama, intent on fleeing from Godrang as though the Devil were chasing me. The lama did not try to stop me.

## CHAPTER II

### THE SECRET OF TRANSMISSION

**I** FLUNG myself outside, still not believing—only to see the cobblestones of the rough street of Godrang, and know that I

was actually in the place. That I had come here so swiftly I also knew to be true, for that lama would not lie to me. I had seen the truth in his eyes.

The street was filled with lamas, and if I had not been so excited I would have realized instantly that there was something terribly wrong with them. None of them said his beads, none of them spun a prayer-wheel. There was abysmal horror in the eyes of each and every one. And a grim determination, which was what I read first. I was not to escape the lamas, though I certainly intended to try. There were fewer lamas to the south, so I flung myself straight into the thick of them, my fists flying out, smashing into fat brown faces, slugging hard at big stomachs. My blows went home with terrific force, for I am a powerful man in spite of my odd build.

I knocked one lama rolling with a blow on the button, just as three lamas jumped me from behind, held me in spite of my struggles, while a fourth carefully took the camera from my shoulders! This was certainly an odd circumstance. Lamas understood cameras, for I had taught many of these very lamas how to use them. But why should they be so careful of *my* camera? I hadn't thought of what could happen to it in a fight, when my camera was usually my first consideration. The lamas had thought of it first. But it didn't strike me just then what this might mean; not that I could have guessed in any case, beyond the fact that they wanted both me and my camera. But why go to so much trouble, and how, exactly, had it been done?

I asked none of these questions then. I was hysterical in my desire to get away. I slugged like a mad-

man. I kicked. I even bit. But the lamas pushed against me, reaching for my body with their fat hands, yanking at me, trying to make me a prisoner—but careful all the time not to injure me. As I remembered, last time I had been here they had not been nearly so careful, either with me or my friend, who had got cracked over the head so hard he hadn't yet recovered and possibly never would.

Their careful handling of me was a break of which I took full advantage. I smashed one flat, broad nose, and the blood spurted. The victim looked pained, but did not cry out. He simply stepped out of the fight and covered his face with both hands. Blood oozed between his fingers. I suppose I should have felt ashamed of myself, though it didn't occur to me at the moment. I wanted to knock down all the lamas between myself and the gate. I knew that I would be pursued, but even that didn't matter.

I had never been in such a panic in my life. Nor had I ever lost my head so completely.

I must have knocked down a dozen of them before they piled onto me *en masse* and bore me to the cobblestones. Two years ago they would have battered me to a pulp if I had resisted so strongly. I was whipped, and the knowledge that this was so added to my terror—nor have I since found any reason to be ashamed of that terror. I think the bravest man I know would have behaved no better, all things considered.

The odor of rancid butter and unwashed bodies was in my nostrils. I could give up now, or struggle on and be smothered under the weight of Yellow Hats. I chose the lesser of two evils. If I became unconscious again, no telling what would happen



to me, recalling all that already had!

"I'll give up," I said, my voice muffled under the weight of men. But it must have reached the lama I had first met, for I could hear his voice come through:

"Release him! He will keep his word!"

**T**HEY stepped back from me, leaving me free to scramble to my feet. I looked at the first lama, noted the vast concern in his eyes, and the same numb bewilderment I had already noticed in the eyes of all the other lamas.

"What is this all about, anyway?"

I asked of Gelong Tse Gatze, the first lama. "Why am I being treated like this?"

"If you'll be calm," said the Gelong, "I'll tell you. Certainly you are entitled to an explanation."

Puffing, I tried to put my rumpled clothing to rights. I was acutely conscious of the cold of the heights, for I still wore the clothing in which I had been working on the Gobi, where, in the pit at least, it had been warm enough. When I had got back some of my lost dignity, I looked around, a bit sheepishly, at the lamas I had knocked around.

I stuck out my tongue at them, trying to grin at the same time, with not too much success. I sucked in my tongue when the lamas answered the greeting by sticking out their own tongues. One or two of those tongues were bitten almost through because I had slugged their owners on the "buttons" with lusty right-handers. They forgave me freely. At the same time I felt that they weren't particularly interested, one way or the other. Their job had been to keep me from escaping, and they had done it. If I were of importance to the Gelong, that was all

right. It did not matter to them directly.

I turned and walked, with such dignity as I could muster, back into the room in which I had "awakened." As I passed a lama who was holding my camera, he calmly looped the strap over my right shoulder—as though he had just been holding it for me while I fought, and now were giving it back. It was so much like a second holding a fighter's coat, and giving it back to him after he had got licked, that it was all I could do to keep from bursting into hysterical laughter.

Gelong Tze Gatze followed me back into the visitors' room, where he squatted on a thick rug. He barked at one of the other lamas, and a rug was brought and spread for me. I sat down, cross-legged, and faced the Gelong.

"Well," I said, "go ahead and talk. Begin by telling me how I got here!"

"You know our contry and our people," he began. "You've been here before. . . ."

"Skip the preliminaries," I said, angrily. "I don't feel like being polite, inasmuch as I have been kidnapped. How did I get here?"

"Some preliminaries are essential, Howard Davies," said the Gelong patiently. "You know that some of our most ascetic lamas, myself included, are able to project our entities across great distances? You have read reports of lamas appearing to their friends hundreds of miles distant from where the lamas actually were, and even speaking to them?"

"Yes, but I never believed it."

"It's quite true," he said heavily. "And I must ask you to regard as a confidence, what I am about to tell you."

"All right, I won't talk until you tell me I may," I said, somewhat

recklessly, now that I come to look back at that moment. "I've heard you can project yourself, as you say, but I never believed it."

"One thing only is not true," he said, "and this is a secret known only to the initiate. We *do* project ourselves, but there is nothing mystical about it. None of those who have 'seen' us do this has ever apparently noticed that a *Kadakh* always figures in the 'miracle' of projection. It is *not* done by will-power."

I waited for him to go on.

"Certain *Kadakhs*," he went on "in the hands of advanced lamas, are not mere symbols of friendship. They are what your civilization would call, I suppose, mechanical creations. They are, in short, magnetic disintegrators and reintegrators. Such a one was tendered to you by Wann Ta Chih of the Ngeloks. At the same moment, Wann Ta Chih and I being in 'contact,' I held the mate to that *Kadakh*. The *Kadakh* in your hands was a mechanical contrivance which instantly, at the will of either Wann Ta Chih or myself—a will expressed by touching an infinitesimal mechanism in the corner of the cloth—disintegrated you at a spot in the Gobi, reintegrated you right here opposite me, as you 'awakened.' *Instantaneously!* It is a mechanical secret high lamas have possessed for several centuries."

I can find no words that really express what I felt at that moment. But that some grave situation existed I knew from one solemn fact: not even an armed invasion of Tibet would have induced *any* lama to thus divulge one of the major secrets of his hold over his people. Therefore what has happening here, and what the Gelong was afraid would happen, must be something earth-shaking, literally.

But why had they picked on me, a slightly more than average photographer, but scarcely more than that? That I knew Tibetan, and several European tongues, and the people of Tibet, the United States and Europe—as Wann Ta Chih had said—scarcely seemed enough. Plainly there was something here, something, unbelievable, which I hadn't even guessed at as yet.

"DON'T tell me that you visited Mars by making a journey like the one I just made here from the Gobi?" I said caustically. "Tell me if you wish, but don't forget to tell me just how you managed to get a second *Kadakh* to Mars first!"

He sighed heavily, paused a moment before going on.

"You are one of the few men who know that Tibetans, especially high lamas," he said, "possess knowledge, scientific knowledge, far beyond that of most of your famous scientists. For years your scientists have talked of sending rockets to the nearest planets. Tibetans have done it. I hope and trust I shall not be compelled to tell you from what high peak in Tibet the rockets were fired. Nor through what trial and tribulation—working in absolute secrecy—the rockets were developed. It was planned that they should break into many pieces on contact with the surface of Mars. . . ."

"And each rocket," I said sarcastically, "contained one of your *Kadakhs!*"

"Exactly! Three of the *Kadakhs* actually landed on Mars."

Understand, as the Gelong talked I knew that every word he spoke was the solemn truth, or that he believed it was the truth. One had but to look into his eyes to have all

doubt removed from one's mind. Here was a man in grave trouble who needed help—needed it so badly he would bring a comparatively insignificant foreigner to Godrang, and give him secrets that would, if told, destroy the religious prestige of Tibet. Plainly he was willing to take that chance—which told me far more than I could grasp.

"The Living Buddha of Godrang," said the Gelong, "selected a dozen important, highly educated lamas, and despatched them to Mars . . ."

He said it as simply as he would have stated that a dozen lamas had been sent to the corner to get a dozen candy bars!

"Our Astronomical observations and calculations had convinced us that earthmen had to wear clothing equipped in a certain way, for them to be able to live on Mars. We so equipped our explorers to the Outside. One by one they left for Mars, from this very room . . ."

Of course I know how it sounds! But I can't change facts, no matter how they sound. I'm not saying at this point, mind you, that those twelve Tibetans went to Mars as I had come to Godrang from the Gobi, but only that the Gelong, whose greatest pride was insistence on the truth, *said* they had.

**I**F they had only explored, then returned to us with their findings!" said the Gelong. "If only they had become acquainted with the Martians, even to the extent of inviting them to visit us here in Tibet! But they went further. The Martians introduced them to the Gargantuan mystery of the Martian Mirror—and they could not resist it. They brought it back with them! It is here in Godrang, in a secret place. The Martians know, and want it back. You

can understand why, when I take you to it, and explain, as far as I am able, the almost Infinite Potential of the Mirror."

"Good Heavens!" I said. "The Martians, using your own thunder, are coming here, via the *Kadakh* . . ."

"No!" The Gelong almost exploded. "When our lamas returned they thought they were preventing pursuit by making sure to bring back every one of the *Kadakhs*! The Martians are filtering into Tibet—by some means which is a mystery to the most learned of us! Somehow they are coming through a break in the Heavside Layer and . . ."

He broke off in the midst of a word. His tongue started to protrude in a way which in no wise resembled the Tibetan greeting of friendship. His face was changing. His hands lifted to his throat, as though he would tear away throttling hands—invisible hands. His voice was hoarse, rasping. He managed to emit one word:

"*Kill!*"

But whom he meant I should kill I could not even guess. I could only watch with horror, a ghastly change in the face, form and demeanor of the Gelong Tze Gatze. The brown of his cheeks took on a greenish tint. The shape of his face altered slightly, changing from obese to what can only be called hawk-like. I tried to cry out to lamas I knew to be waiting outside, beyond the door that had been closed to assure Tze Gatze and me of privacy. But no words would leave my lips. It was almost as though I, too, were being throttled.

The hands of Tze Gatze, which were also changing in a horrible way, that made me think of tentacles, fluttered down from his throat. His thumb caught in his prayer beads, and his head bent a little as he looked

at the beads. He frowned a trifle, as though the beads puzzled him.

Then he straightened, and a grimace which might have been intended for a smile—and succeeded in being a ghastly travesty of one—touched his lips that had gone cruelly thin. This *thing* which, I sensed, played a horrible Mr. Hyde to the Gelong's Dr. Jekyll, raised the right hand. Out of the thin lips came a reedy voice, uttering, in Tibetan, the most astounding words any Earthman ever harkened to:

*"Greetings from Outside, Howar Davees! Listen for a moment before you cast your lot with our enemies!"*

I realized, with a numbing sense of catastrophe, that a denizen of Mars spoke to me from the body of the Gelong Tze Gatze!

### CHAPTER III

#### GATHERING HORROR

**F**OR a minute or an hour—I could never afterward decide how long—the world stood still as I tried to realize this utter impossibility. As I looked at this monstrous stranger, who smiled back at me enigmatically, with an air of superiority that in itself was enough to terrify the bravest, thoughts went through my brain like lightning flashes. In times of great stress some men are numbed to inactivity, even to thought. Some men are filled with thoughts. This particular time my brain was busy, while my body stood there like a statue, my eyes meeting those of the stranger because I could not tear them away.

Some of my thoughts were irrelevant.

The manner in which I had come to Godrang, for instance. Obviously the Tibetan disintegrator-reintegrat-

ors were operative on anything in contact with the *Kadakh* at the time the "signal" was given. That explained why I had made the "trip" fully dressed, with the camera over my shoulder. It explained how the Tibetans—though I was not yet ready to believe this thing—had landed on Mars fully equipped for existence there. The mechanism of those *Kadaks* was something I might never be able to understand, but if the gods were good to me I'd take one of them apart as soon as possible, and photograph the thing in detail.

Yes, even in my terror I was a photographer first, instinctively.

Then, Gelong Tze Gatze had spoken of being "in contact" with Wann Ta Chih at a given moment. Had he been able to see the Ngolok across six hundred miles of range and mountain and valley? Were the *Kadaks* radios and televisors as well? Naturally there was none who could answer me. The Gelong Tze Gatze. . .

*Where was the Gelong Tze Gatze?*

Obviously this monster who "wore" his earthly casement was not Tze Gatze. And I had associated with scientists too long to have any great belief in the soul. Or so I had thought for years, until I was now faced with this impossible thing. A Martian had taken possession of the Gelong. But how? And with what? Through the medium of some living essence that was all of the Martian, whatever all of him might be, except his material hutment? What was that all? I'd have to call it soul, spirit, essence, anything, until I found an answer that the world I knew would accept.

Accept? I hadn't the slightest hope that any part of my world would accept any part of this. The Chinese, back on the Gobi, would tell Funston

such a tale of my disappearance that, when relayed out to the press of the world, it would give rise to all sorts of tales, some of them perhaps even more fantastic than the truth.

A voice seemed to whisper inside me:

*"Kill! Kill!"*

I could feel the word. It was like a single tentacle, probing in my very brain, trying to make itself felt, heard, understood. I was accustomed to telepathy, for I had had Tibetans, adepts at it, experiment with me in times past. The Gelong Tze Gatze wasn't here now, or if he was I couldn't see him, but he was trying to make me conscious of the last word I had heard him utter:

*"Kill! Kill!"*

He was urging me to kill the monster. *But instantly, even if I could manage to do so, what would become of the Gelong who had been displaced by him?* That the Gelong himself, wherever he was, knew the answer to that, and still urged me to kill his body, didn't make me feel any less squeamish about it. I had a horror of killing almost as great as that which is the life-blood of the truly religious Tibetan. One of his most inviolable commandments is:

*"Thou shalt not kill!"* Tibetans even prayed for forgiveness when compelled to slay animals for food.

It takes time to tell, though it happened in lightning flashes of thought. I recalled, as the primary commandment flashed through my mind, of another almost as inviolate:

*"Thou shalt not steal!"*

Yet Tibetans had stolen the Martian Mirror! That fact indicated something to me that would not have occurred to anyone not familiar with Tibetans. To Tibetans, believing in

reincarnation, in Karma, the law of Cause and Effect, every sin must be paid for. Life on earth was punishment. Stealing anything, however small, meant that the thief, in order to atone, must reincarnate and make payment in successive lives until full restitution had been made. What sort of payment would those thieving lamas on Mars have expected to make for something so earth-shakingly important as the Martian Mirror seemed to be? A creation, an implement, so important to Martians that they had found a way of their own to reach the earth to get the Mirror back! A horrible, monstrous way.

What in Heaven's name was the Mirror of Mars?

**R**IGHT here in front of me, while I tried to figure out what to do, was a creature who could give me the answer, in the Tibetan he must have learned from the lamas who had committed the rape of Mars. But how did one go about questioning such a one?

*"Kill! Kill! Kill!"*

Over and over in my head now, like tremendous drumbeats, hammered the one word which had been Tze Gatze's last frenzied attempt to communicate with his world before he had been displaced by this Martian who waited so calmly for my next move. And I could feel the Martian himself probing my brain, trying to anticipate that move. I knew there was a ceremonial sword, used in Devil dances by the sorcerers, on the wall behind me. If I could get my hands on that sword....

*"If you knew all the details,"* said that reedy voice suddenly, *"of the matter which lies between Martians and Tibetans, you would not consider slaying me. I am come only to take*

*back that which belongs to the Great Selfless Ones!"*

"Great Selfless Ones?" I stammered. "Who....what....?"

"Martian guardians of the Mirror," he said. "Martian scientists whose families, through succeeding generations, are consecrated to the guardianship of the Mirror."

Another hint of the immense importance of the Mirror! Families on Mars, guarding it generation after generation—a dynasty of guardians, almost an institution of divine right. Important enough for a dozen Tibetans to barter their souls, to accept punishment—in their own minds at least—through many lives, to possess the Mirror.

Moreover, the Gelong had said that the Tibetans had been chosen for the journey to Mars by the Living Buddha himself—a man whom the people regarded as a living, physical godhead! The Buddha hadn't told them to steal the Mirror, but since it had been in Tibet for three months, according to Wann Ta Chih, he plainly had not returned it!

If it were that important, even to a Living Buddha, then it seemed to me there was no question as to my stand. Tibetans were alien to me, but Tibetans, considered beside Martians, were my own people—Earthmen. My way was clear, nebulous though the reasoning which dictated it.

I whirled to the broadsword on the wall. I had it in my hand, was rushing on the Martian, when he spoke softly,

*"How will you explain the death of Tze Gatze to his people? Are you sure enough of yourself to risk certain death to encompass not my death, really, but that of Tze Gatze?"*

"I will convince his people of the truth," I heard myself saying hoarse-

ly, though I checked the movement of the great sword.

"I am," he said quietly, *"as far as they are concerned, the Gelong Tze Gatze!"*

I was thunderstruck. It had been the voice of Tze Gatze which had just come from the person of the invader. But it hadn't actually been Tze Gatze who had spoken. I was sure of this in the next instant, when that single word hammered again, more savagely, until my head ached with it, in my brain:

*"Kill! Kill! Kill!"*

**I** THOUGHT, in another of those flashes, that the people of Godrang would certainly be able to notice how Tze Gatze's face had changed, his hands, his eyes, everything about him. Mimicry of his voice could not hide those differences that were so startling to me. The Martian read my thought, seemingly, for he lifted his hands, pulled the hood of Tze Gatze's robe over his head, so that it shadowed his face. I knew that no devout Buddhist would think of pushing back that cowl to look at the face beneath. I was checkmated at this point.

Nor was that all. The Martian was suddenly telling his beads with those changed hands, so swiftly that he might have done it all his life, as Tze Gatze had! All I could think of, to explain it, was that he did it with the accustomed hands of Tze Gatze himself. *The longer I delayed, the more completely this monster possessed every capability of Tze Gatze!*

I made my decision, though I knew I might well die for it. There was no mistaking the despairing urgency of that whispered command within

my brain; that command to kill... kill!...kill!

I swung into action with the ceremonial sword. The Martian ducked under the slashing of the blade, which had all my strength behind it. He activated the body of Tze Gatze with far greater ease than had Tze Gatze himself, a fact which filled me with unutterable horror. The man *must* die!

"Others will take my place," he said calmly, "*for we are many!*"

How many of his kind were already in Tibet, in full possession of the bodies of bandits, lamas, *nukhwas* (sorcerers), marshalling their forces, of which earthmen could have no real conception, to force the return of the Martian Mirror?

I came much closer with my next sword-blow. I grazed the top of the monster's head, almost felling him. He began then a scurrying back and forth, and roundabout, in the narrow confines of the room. But even as I almost beheaded him, half a dozen times, I felt that he held me in contempt, was laughing at me—that I but worked into his hands by trying to kill him, because I was really giving him more time to complete his possession of Tze Gatze.

"Kill! Kill! Kill!"

The word had become a shout in my aching brain. It had become a prayer for mercy on all Tibet, on all the world. It had become a despairing litany. If I failed....

But I would not fail. I tried to out-manuever the Martian, tried to trap him in a corner, where I could smash him down, slash him to ribbons.

And now he became more nearly Tze Gatze than ever he had before. He cried out for help, to the lamas and attendants who waited outside. They began battering at the door.

I could have jumped to the wall and restored the sword, but my mind did not work that way. Instead, I redoubled my efforts to slay the Martian. How he ducked, how he evaded all my blows, I can't for the life of me imagine. The body of Tze Gatze was like that of a mongoose, under the Martian's control. That fact, in such a comparatively simple and earthy matter, suggested far vaster power than I had even dreamed of so far.

The Martian kept crying out—and laughing soundlessly at me as he did so. The lamas outside had set up a terrific uproar. I heard the Martian insist that they batter in the door. As I redoubled my efforts, while sweating blood in my increased speed with the sword, I heard the lamas bring a battering-ram into play against the huge, nail-studded portal.

"They'll kill you," said the Martian.

"You will not be here to see them do it," I grated.

"It is not within your power actually to kill me," he said. "The most you can do is strike down the body of Tze Gatze, thereby forcing my instant return to Mars!"

"Then why are you trying so hard to save yourself?" I yelled.

"To avoid the delay involved in going to Mars and returning here—and finding another body suitable for my purposes! A matter of hours, at most, but hours are important to the Great Selfless Ones."

There it is; make of it what you will.

All I can say is that I came within hairsbreadths, a score of times, of touching the Martian fatally. Yet I did not even break his skin. He seemed never to tire, while the sword was becoming a ton of lead in my hands.



And then, the door came down, and lamas poured into the room. They took in the situation—or what they thought the situation to be—in a glance. The Martian stepped back, stood aloof, his hands out of sight in his robe, his face shadowed again by the cowl.

The lamas attacked me ferociously, and this time they were not trying to save my skin. In their minds I had committed, or tried to commit, the unforgivable sin. I had attacked the person of a holy lama. They had caught me in the act of trying to cut him to ribbons.

Fists smashed into my face and body. Heavy shoes crashed against my shins. I went down, and they began to kick me. I was done for, in a matter of minutes, unless . . .

**T**HAT will do," said the Martian, in the voice of Tze Gatze. "I am inclined to mercy. Secure him, put him to rights, and take him before the Living Buddha, with Whose Holiness I shall discuss what is to be done with him!"

They yanked me to my feet. I glared at the Martian from puffed eyes. I screamed through mashed and bleeding lips:

"He is not the Gelong Tze Gatze! He is a Martian, here to take back the Mirror! He has taken possession of the body of your priest!"

For a brief moment there was silence. The Martian chuckled, said,

"Think you, really, that any evil force could displace me?"

How well that monster knew the Tibetan mind! To Tibetans nothing was impossible to a Gelong—of a rank so high that he could stand at the right hand of any Living Buddha in Tibet. That any entity could forcibly displace the soul, spirit, essence, of one of their Gelongs, was

as utterly beyond belief as that such an entity could cast one of their Living Buddhas down from his spiritual throne.

I was lost, sure enough. But the Martian had saved my life. Why? And he had commanded that I be taken to the Living Buddha. What was he up to? He could fool these lamas, but did he hope also to fool anyone as psychically powerful as a Living Buddha? He must be quite sure of it. What then, was the source and extent of his power?

Would to Heaven, I said to myself, that I had been able to slay him—though by so doing I condemn Tze Gatze himself to punishment for a dozen lives. Tze Gatze had been willing and eager to pay the price, that the Martian might be destroyed. I had failed miserably. Tze Gatze could have no further use for me. The Martian, however, must have some use, else he would not have had me spared. But I wasn't finished yet.

"Take me to His Holiness," I said, "but as you value the safety of Your Living Buddha, as you value the Mirror, as you value the freedom of Tibet, imprison this man in this room, and surround it with many guards!"

One of the lamas slapped me across the face with his long sleeve, which was like a whip, the way he used it.

I was jerked and hauled from the room. I tried to look back to see whether the Martian followed, but when I tried to turn, the sleeves of many lamas, used as whips, cracked across my face to discourage me. I had forfeited the right even to be concerned about the creature they were sure was the Gelong Tze Gatze.

I must gain control of myself, en route to the palace of the Living Buddha, high on the side of the cliff

where the lamasery was built. Somehow I must convince him of what had happened. I felt, deep inside me, that he would understand.

Yes, he might understand. Besides, he knew me of old, from two years before. Rimpoche Emdap Muh, Living Buddha of Godrang — age nineteen years! But with a wisdom, as I remembered, to shame the brains of some of the greatest intellectuals I knew.

I fought for control. I looked at the lamasery buildings, huge piles of stone against the slant of the mountain. Roofs sagging with gold, above walls that were topped by layers of rhododendron stalks. Massive, cold-looking buildings built for ascetics, looking more like fortresses and prisons than the abodes of human beings, however devout. Scores and hundreds of those buildings.

Above the heads of the marching lamas, who now were chanting and whirling their prayer-wheels as they neared the Palace, I could see the open country beyond and below the lamasery. I could see the *chortens* in which rested the ashes of important lamas. I could see great crowds of Tibetans, some of them camped on the open ground, some of them sitting their horses afar off. . . .

But I missed one thing, at once. There was no endless crowd circumambulating the lamasery—no vast line of men and women, slowly marching around the lamasery, spinning the great prayer-drums set into the outer wall, or measuring their own lengths by successive prostrations on the ground as they made the holy circuit. It was the first time I had ever seen or heard of, Tibetans standing immobile before a holy place—with no apparent regard to the safety of their own souls!

How can I hope to make an out-

lander understand what that sight meant to one who knew? Tibet was standing still, forgetting even to pray, because its people sensed a catastrophe too great for even prayer to avail!

As though the Martian, somewhere behind me, had read my thought, I was conscious, the instant I recognized this tell-tale dreadful sign, that he chuckled with hideous amusement. But perhaps not. My captors paid no heed, if even they had heard.

Could the Martian, telepathic as he seemed to be, keep even lamas from thinking, surmising, sensing what had gone wrong? Could a master telepathist shut out thought, or will others not even to think—and do it successfully? I was ready, now, to believe that, to this one Martian at least, anything was possible.

I was numb with terror. I tried to allay the numbness by concentrating on the Martian Mirror. Where was it? What were its capabilities? How large was it? But my unanswered questions only served to emphasize the proportions of the growing horror. Deep in my heart I even whispered, with a dreadful urgency (and this will show you how deep all this had entered into me, that I should so forget my scientific training) to Tze Gatze, wherever he might be.

*"Help me to say the right thing! Reach, somehow, the brain of the Living Buddha, and warn him. Give me a chance to redeem myself, for I am beginning to realize how great is the need!"*

Over and over I concentrated on the thought, as though it had been a prayer from the depths of my soul. But I could sense no answer.

I had never been so alone, with such a terrific weight of responsibil-



*Here was a man in grave trouble, who needed help . . .*

ity upon shoulders totally untrained to bear such responsibility.

I sensed only the gleeful chuckling of the Martian.

#### CHAPTER IV

##### DOORS BEGIN TO OPEN

**I** SEE NO reason for a long detailing of the ways through which men must pass to gain audience with a Living Buddha. Besides, in my case most of those steps were disregarded. Ritual and routine had been almost broken down by the darkest shadow that had ever hung over Tibet—the land of dark shadows, wherein holy men work side by side with sorcerers—who

work with the King of Hell—to look after the souls of their people.

The chanting, the funeral marching of the lamas, was all that remained of a ritual that, the first time I ever visited this man, had lasted for many hours. There was an emergency here, and even the marching was hurried.

I entered the palace, passed through several doors, and was left standing before the largest and most ornate. Beyond that door, I knew, was the Rimpoche Emdap Muh, who must certainly know of my coming, as well as a great many things that were still a mystery to me.

My captors swung away to right and left, emphasizing the fact of their careful guardianship of His

Holiness, who was the temporal and spiritual head of a vast area in Tibet. I was to go in alone.

I stepped to the door, when it was opened—by, of all people, the Living Buddha himself! Great indeed must have been the urgency, that he did not leave such menial tasks to his attendants. The face of the Rimpoche was very grave. His dark eyes took note of me, then flashed over the faces of those who had brought me. His voice cracked like a whip when he cried out,

"Secure at once the body of the Gelong Tze Gatze and bring it to me!"

I was the first to notice the peculiarity of the wording of the command. And the lamas were not far behind in understanding. Some of them jerked their heads to look at me, and I knew that every last one of them recalled just what accusations I had made. But it was too late to rectify mistakes, I knew at once, for I could not see the Martian anywhere. He had vanished, a fact of which all were aware on the instant, so that a murmur of consternation ran through the assemblage. The murmur rose in intensity, in spite of the presence of His Holiness, to whom not one of the Tibetans had remembered to bend the knee. The murmur became a paean of terror. I could read the minds of the Tibetans, and I am no adept in telepathy. They were thinking what a terrific power an entity must wield, that he could steal away the body of Tze Gatze, from Tze Gatze himself.

"Move!" said the Rimpoche. "Dead or alive, I must look upon the body of the Gelong Tze Gatze, or we are all undone!"

What a terrible admission for a godhead to make, a fact which none of the lamas missed. It added to

their terror, which perhaps His Holiness fully intended. They began to boil from the palace, forgetting all about me, and that I might well constitute a menace to their spiritual leader, who now seemed to be conscious of me for the first time. His eyes looked deeply into mine for a few moments. Then a gentle smile broke over his face. A smile that was sad as it was gentle. I knew, as I had always known that here, misguided or not, was a holy man—if for no other reason than that he was regarded as a living god by so many thousands of people. He gave to his people a Diety they could see, feel, and hear, something on which to focus their religion, something of which they could conceive.

"Ah, my friend Davies," said the Rimpoche. "I had intended sending for you."

He came to me and held out his hand. We clasped hands, a gesture I myself had taught him during a period which has no important connection with this account, though it motivated it from beginning to end, as I was soon to discover.

"How did Your Holiness know what had happened to the Gelong?" I demanded. I felt I already knew the answer he would make, though I would never know for sure whether it was the right one—and whether or not, from beginning to end, I was having my leg pulled. Still, a Living Buddha would not play pranks, and I had been brought a long way by strange means, to have jokes played on me for the amusement of nobody in particular, especially myself.

"I had it, Davies, from the Gelong, Tze Gatze. His spirit has been imploring me to take action."

I let it go at that, knowing better than to try to understand, though I had a pretty good idea because of

the single word, "Kill!" which had hammered so insistently on the retina of my own brain.

Emdap Muh led the way into his private chambers, sat down, and beckoned me to sit on a cushion below his dais, or throne. Then he waved his attendants out of the room, though they protested audibly. He had no reason to fear me, and knew it very well. His attendants were not so sure.

**T**HERE isn't time to describe his dress, except that it was Tibetan royalty, gorgeous throughout, so brilliant in the coloring of its silk and satin that it almost flamed. His ornaments were worth a king's ransom, many times over. The gold in his palace alone would have paid off the debt of many a smaller nation of the world—even some of them at war, and carried on the war besides.

But Emdap Muh, to me, was just a nineteen year old boy. A holy boy, reincarnation of a god—according to his people—but a boy just the same. A handsome one, with a sweet face and a brilliant mind, but still a boy.

"Your Holiness caused me to be brought here," I began, knowing I need not stand on ceremony of address as far as he was concerned, thus beginning about where we had left off when he had been seventeen. "May I now know why?"

"To understand a very great and important work, for the betterment, perhaps even the salvation of the world!"

I gasped.

"But I am only a photographer with a scientific expedition."

"But you are an unusually expert photographer, and that is exactly what we need."

I began to get a glimmer, though

some things had still to be cleared up.

"Then Wann Ta Chih, the Ngolok bandit...."

"Is a Gelong, and no bandit. The Ngoloks cooperate with all the rest of Tibet on a spiritual mission, for one of the few times. Wann Ta Chih simply substituted himself for a Ngolok leader."

"Then he, too, is back in Godrang? He came back as I was brought here...."

"He did not will to come, because I was not yet ready. There is still the matter of your expedition, in the Gobi. Your leader there is still your best contact with the outside world. Wann Ta Chih remains in Ngolokwa to reassure your people that you are safe, and that they should continue with their work."

"He did not need to open fire on us," I said hotly.

The Rimpoche grinned. "Was anyone slain?"

"No," I said slowly. "No, there wasn't."

"You should make allowances for Tibetan humor, Davies. I do. I am glad that there is still a sense of humor in Tibet, where it is so sorely needed."

His face went grave again, and I knew that there would be no more levity, nor so much as a hint of it. He hesitated for a moment before going on. I helped him a little.

"The Martian Mirror?" I said. "Though why a Living Buddha should connive at theft...."

"The good of the world," he said softly, "is more important to me than my soul, though I live a thousand years in Hell for condoning that theft. The Mirror of Mars may prove the salvation of the world—provided we can retain possession of it until we have worked out the plan that

we have for making the fullest use of it. His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, has commissioned me to do the executive work...."

"But what is it?" I demanded, frowning, not caring at all about the niceties of address. "What's all the fuss about a Mirror? And where is it? What are its properties?"

I had, for a moment, forgotten all about the Martian. This Emdap Muh's personality was so striking, so suggestive of power, I think he affected everyone with whom he came in contact, the same way. He absorbed visitors into himself, so that they forgot all else. If only there were room in *my* world for some of his kind who were as sincere as that boy!

He said his beads for a moment, seeming to consider, seeming to have forgotten me. Then he rose, went to the door, opened it again himself, and snapped commands at his waiting attendants.

"Bring me the bodies of...."

And he rattled off, like machine-gun bullets, at least forty Tibetan names! Someone screamed with terror, beyond that door. The scream was broken off by a slapping sound, as a stronger lama struck the screamer across the mouth with his long sleeve. Emdap Muh turned back to me, his face graver than ever.

"Forty one of my people have been displaced," he said, "and more may be expected hourly. We must get to work then, for it may be that we shall lose control of the Mirror, shall not be able to prevent its return to Mars. If this happens, perhaps we can make another...."

But he shook his head, changed the subject.

"Thou shalt not kill" is a strong command with us, Davies. But this is so important that I would com-

mand that every invader be slain, out of hand, though his gods be my gods—and I would, however much I suffered, risk the lives of my people and my own, to retain possession of the Mirror."

"I've heard enough about the Mirror, Your Highness," I said. "If I'm to see it, where is it? If I must work at my trade, for any reason, let me know about it. I'm tired of being kept in the dark. Can't you take it for granted that I am with you?"

**H**E stared at me for a moment. He did not take offense, intuitively knowing my sincerity—or maybe telepathically. I still could not be sure how he had discovered that forty one of his lamas had been "displaced," proof, no matter how he had learned it, that the forces of Outside were gathering.

"Come with me," said the Rimpoche. I rose and followed him, through a door behind his throne. Into a smaller room, where an attendant slept, through another room—by which time I knew that we had entered a part of the dwelling hewn out of the solid rock of the mountain on which the lamasery was built.

Back and back we went, through a succession of rooms, now all lighted by flambeaus, until we came to the one where I knew the Living Buddha slept—and which not even an army could have reached, save by stealth. The Tibetans of Godrang certainly looked after the safety of their youthful godhead!

We went on through that room, through a door, and started swiftly down a circular stairway, cut out of the stone. There were guttering candles set in niches everywhere along

the way. The Rimpoche paused to tell me an astounding thing.

"I, and I alone, enter here. I even see that the candle and the flambeaus are lighted, doing it with my own hand. You are the first outlander ever to so much as see this staircase. No feet save those of former Living Buddhas have touched these steps since this vault was hewn out of the mountains. None of the workmen who did it live today, nor do their descendants know of them."

Strange words. They sent a chill through me, emphasizing the vast difference between this man's world and mine; a chill that was not in the air of the vault, for that was almost uncomfortably warm. What was I going to see? The Rimpoche, going gently down those steps, talked on a bit more,

"I and I alone held the *Kadakh* by which that which you are about to see, became the most precious possession of the Lamasery of Godrang, of Tibet, of the world. My hands alone set it in place."

I was in a fever of impatience. The world I had always known had drawn a long way off from me so that I remembered it as in a distant, misty dream. I might be descending into Tibetan Bardo, for all I had to do with the things I knew.

At last, the bottom, and a vaster room than any I had ever seen. The Rimpoche looked around him, such an expression of reverence on his face as I have never seen in my life. He indicated the piles and boxes and shelves and crates, groaning with scrolls, books, tablets of stone on which there were Tibetan characters....

"Here are the secrets of my race, Davies," he said calmly. "Here are the most ancient of our manuscripts. Here are secrets of longevity, of re-

incarnation, of Karma, of the great thaumaturgists, of which the world does not yet know. The world must go through its flames before the time shall come when it may possess, because it has earned the right, the wisdom of the ages which my people have gathered here. Godrang, Davies, though few know it, was the capital of the Dalai Lamas, long before the Potala became known to the world, or there was a city called Lhasa! And here is the story."

That was enough, of course, to make a curious man hold his breath. But I could read Tibetan with difficulty, Sanscrit not at all....

"And here, Davies," he said calmly, "*is the Mirror of Mars!*"

I had seen it, but had not guessed what it was. It might have been some outlandish desk for a student, by the look of it. It also resembled a huge cooking pot, suspended on grooved stakes. It was a semi-globe, the flat surface uppermost.

As, a moment later, I looked down at the smooth, flat surface of its top—which was as black as obsidian, and even in the dim light reflected the faces of Emdap Muh and me with startling clarity—I estimated that its diameter was approximately twelve feet. I touched the thing. I guessed it was made of glass, or quartz, or....

"If you could see anything you wished to, anywhere in the world," said the Rimpoche, "this instant, what would it be?"

I looked at him, startled....

"Or in the Universe!" he added.

All I could think of was that I would like to see how things were going back in the Gobi. No sooner had I spoken than the beautiful, soft, graceful hands of the Living Buddha began to move, touching various



spots on the rim of the Mirror. This done, he began to manipulate the mounting, and I saw that its base could move all around the area of a circle on the floor, like a turning table, and that the semi-globe itself could be shifted to any position.

Then I forgot all about these things, for there was a faint glow appearing, in the very heart of the Mirror. Just a spot of light, but it grew with amazing speed, so that it was almost an explosion.

I saw, within ten seconds—at a guess—all the area of my camp. I saw the Chinese taking care of the horses, camels and goats. I saw the pit where we had been working. I saw, too, that the Tibetans under Wann Ti Chih had somehow made friends with the Chinese, and were sharing the camp.

By the time I had taken note of these details the picture—what else can I call it, or wish to call it, being a photographer?—had grown until it covered the entire face of the semi-globe.

I saw the lips of my men move, twitch. I heard the Gobi sand crunch under the feet of beasts and men. I could have been in no more complete possession of the details of that camp had I been right there with my people.

"Do you wish," came the soft voice of the Rimpoche, "*to hear what they are saying?*"

**M**Y BRAIN reeled with all he suggested. And he gave me no time to think. He touched something, and my camp vanished. He moved the surface of the Mirror slightly, said,

"*I shall permit you to see the face of the young Dalai Lama, in the Potala at Lhasa!*"

The picture exploded into being.

There was no mistaking the face of that nine year old reincarnation of the chief Living Buddha of Tibet. Nor could that be anything but the Potala, and Lhasa.

"It could be a trick," I muttered.

He did not answer, at least in words. He shifted the mechanism again, working with lightning speed—activity that would have shocked his people to the cores of their being had they so much as guessed—and then stepped back.

I looked into the heart of Times Square during the theater hour. I watched the vast electrical display flash on and off. I saw the hurrying automobiles, the street-cars, the buses, the thousands of pedestrians.

"Even this could be faked," I heard myself saying.

He did not answer, at least aloud. His hand simply moved—and out of that Mirror, from somewhere in the heart of the picture I was seeing, which was so much Times Square in detail that it *was* Times Square, came the voice of the most magnificent city on the face of this earth!

I heard the horns and sirens, the chattering of people, the scuffling of feet on pavement, the cries of news vendors, the discordant clashing of radios going full blast.

But for the fact that I was standing in a Tibetan dungeon, ten thousand miles from Times Square, I might just as well have been standing at the tip of that Triangle which is the Times Building, and drinking in the sights and sounds as I had done thousands of times actually.

"There is nothing in the Universe," said the Rimpoche, blotting out the picture, silencing the nostalgic voice of my favorite city, "that I cannot show you in the face of the Mirror of Mars! The path of an electron? I can show you the electron! The

core of the earth? The stratas of the world's crust? I have seen all these things, many times. What shall I show you now, that you may never question again the importance of this Mirror, that men should risk their immortal souls for hundreds of lives, to possess it?"

"Mars," I said, "and the bodies of those whose essences have displaced those of our people!"

He must have expected that, for he moved faster than ever.

"Mars!" he said quietly.

I looked at the surface of the red planet. He focussed on a city like none I had ever seen. He focussed on a building. He focussed on a room in that building. It might have been a morgue. . . .

For lying in a big room, side by side—with room on all sides for hundreds more!—were forty seven creatures that were neither men nor beasts, yet were somehow both! Immobile, they seemed to be dead..

"Six more Martians," said the Rimpoche, "*have displaced Tibetans since I brought you to the Mirror!*"

No sooner had he spoken — as though it had been a signal—than a sinister noise came down from somewhere in the eerily lighted gloom of that circular staircase of stone. Cries of terror. Weird, eldritch sounds which somehow hinted of triumph.

"*And some of those forty seven bodies you have just seen in a room of the dead on Mars are, in the bodies of some of my lamas, knocking at the door by which we arrived! Well, Davies?*"

I stared at the calm, gentle face of the Living Buddha. I know that what I said sounds melodramatic now, but it was all sincerity then, even to my most excited heartbeat. I said, through gritted teeth:

"Over my dead body!"

"And mine," he answered, "and those of my people. You realize what this Mirror means to the world, no matter how we came by it?"

"Yes, Your Holiness. Riches, power, prestige, dominion. . . ."

I did not seek for other words, for no sooner had I spoken them than I knew how paltry they were; that Emdap Muh gave not the slightest thought to any of the things I had mentioned. He was too great a man to care for material things, or for power to smash his fellows.

Yet somebody was going to have to do some smashing, if he and I were to keep on living.

I knew that the "invaders"—even then I had to admit that right was on their side—were inside the sleeping quarters of Emdap Muh, and would soon be descending those stone stairs.

I didn't wait for His Holiness as I raced for those steps. He pressed something into my hand, but I did not look at it, knowing it a weapon of some sort. I did not look back to see whether he followed. But I heard his footfalls on the stone behind me, hitting solidly, and just as regularly as my own.

I confess, too, that I heard him laugh, just under his breath—as though he were looking forward to a good fight. Good thing none of his followers or mentors heard *that*! He didn't mind much if I heard and understood. For I remembered something that none of his teachers ever bothered to remember. Six years before, I myself had been nineteen years old!

We made that door at the top before the Martians did. We burst through. I looked down at the weapon that he had given me. It was a perfectly good Colts .45 automatic. I know exactly how good it was, for

the weapon was my own! I began to suspect that *Kadakhs* in Godrang, and a certain *Kadakh* in the Gobi, were working overtime!

Without the slightest compunction I drilled a "Martian" between the eyes, as I erupted into the Buddha's bedroom by one door, and that particular Martian erupted into it from the opposite one.

## CHAPTER V

### THAT FIRST GRIM RAID

**N**O GREATER sacrilege could have been committed in the rooms of the Living Buddha, in a land where the law against taking life was so closely adhered to. Nor could I, even as I surged into the room, and fired a bullet into the brain of a Martian—or into the skull of a Tibetan lama who had been displaced by a Martian—conceive of Emdap Muh engaging in battle.

The Martian plunged to the floor on his face. Nor did it look like any lama so falling. There was something feral, animal-like, in the fall of the first victim among the "invaders."

Outside a terrific struggle was going forward. Tibetans, even lamas, could fight like wildcats when cornered, or when their best interests were violated. In some manner they had become aware of the danger lurking within the bodies of men whom they had known for years, with whom many of them must have been intimately associated for a long time.

Emdap Muh cried out, "Do not slay them! Take them alive!"

His voice rang out like a clarion, a rallying cry to his followers. But while they gathered to his defense,

they appeared not to have heard his command against killing. For they came in, all mingled with the Martians, fighting them every step of the way. And the holy of holies, where Emdap Muh lived, promised to become a charnal house.

For my own part I now had no such compunction against slaying as that which prompted the Living Buddha to issue his sharp command. These men were here to defile a holy place. Even if their Mirror had not been here, I was one with the Living Buddha in denying them ingress to the place of ancient records. It was a violation I could not brook personally, whatever the Living Buddha might think about it.

I suppose he had forgotten that he had bidden his lamas bring him forty one men, dead or alive, that he now shouted that they must not be slain.

The Martians, however, themselves made anything but a fight to the death impossible. They had intruded in the living quarters of Emdap Muh, and in the eyes of the lamas that was a mortal offense—an offense so great that their ears were deaf to the command of that same spiritual leader.

For my own part, I knew that the Martians, fired by the frenzy of battle, had got out of hand, whatever their original intentions may have been, and that the Living Buddha was actually in physical danger.

So, making each shot count, and picking out the Martians by little signs which I could recognize because I had actually witnessed the "displacing" of Tze Gatze, I sped my bullets into the thick of them, taking care, however, not to down lamas I still believed to be lamas.

A half dozen Martians were down, and the mosaic floor of the richly

furnished quarters of His Holiness was smeared with their blood—or rather with the blood of the men whose bodies they had managed to steal, in a manner which only the Martians knew how to use.

Seven bullets I had in that Colts, and I counted coup with it seven times, because the enemy were so close I could not miss. I shot for their skulls or their hearts. I heard the bullets smash home. On their part the lamas, armed with ancient ceremonial swords, or bludgeons, or even with heavy prayer-wheels—I saw a frenzied lama hammer a Martian's head to a pulp with a prayer-wheel—fought like men possessed. I suppose they felt, one and all, that if anything happened to Emdah Muh, their souls would pay the penalty through heaven knew how many hard reincarnations.

The room was a milling place of action. I saw a huge Martian—and even as it occurred to me I wondered if it might not have been a small Martian really, with the body of a Tibetan giant—lift a lama over his head and fling him clear across the room, spinning as he flew, legs kicking, cap flying off, and long hair free. His head crashed squarely into the rock wall, and it seemed to me that the lama actually telescoped as he hit.

I know he fell like an empty sack to the floor, where he scarcely kicked at all.

I counted my own victims, and saw that I had garnered an enemy with each of my bullets. Nor did they trouble my conscience in the least. Slaying people from Mars did not somehow strike me as slaying human beings. Those moveless creatures I had seen in that room, in that austere building in a nameless city on

Mars, had looked like nothing human to me.

I did not mind slaying animals, and these men were worse than animals, though they had the appearance—because of the strangest series of “thefts” in history—of being human beings, and holy lamas.

A half dozen of the Martians had backed into a corner, where they were fighting with all the power at their command—using the hands and fists and teeth of the lamas whose bodies they had usurped. They screamed as they fought, in a weird, outlandish gibberish. They did not show fear, nor too much science as fighters. It occurred to me, as I lowered my weapon and fumbled for extra clips I did not have, to reload, that they might well be advanced in civilization alien to ours, far beyond any knowledge of war.

Just the same, they gave a good account of themselves.

**A**ND the end, as it had been with me when I tried to escape from the Gelong Tze Gatze, was a foregone conclusion. They ended up on the floor, “their” blood staining the sacred stones, their lives sighing out of them with sounds that were fearfully human. Only now did the excited lamas seem to hear the voice of their ruler:

“Take them alive! No more killing!”

They stepped back as one, and looked down at their handiwork, and I could see the horror begin to grow in their faces as they realized what they had done—slain more than two-score “human” beings within the sacred portals of their holiest place, next to the Potala.

“Bring me,” said the gentle voice of Emdap Muh, “one of the living who is able, still, to talk.”

A high-rank lama looked down at the crumpled Martians, grasped one by the shoulder, pulled him forth, dragged him before Emdap Muh.

The dying man knew whom he faced, I could tell. And had some idea what Emdap Muh wished to ask him. But he waited, while the life ebbed slowly from the body he had stolen.

"Why have you forced your way into my presence?" said the Living Buddha.

"You need to ask that," said the Martian, in that reedy voice which seemed to be a characteristic of them, if they were inside Earthmen's carcasses, "when you possess that which really belongs to the people of my world?"

"Just who are you?" persisted Emdap Muh.

"An humble guardian of the Mirror, one of the Great Selfless Ones," said the Martian. "Why have you caused us all to be slain? We understood, all of us, in our world, why your people should have wished so greatly to possess the Mirror that they resorted to theft to procure it. We are great in understanding. There was no need of slaying—*up to this moment!*"

I stared at the Living Buddha. His face was very pale. I knew it was dawning on him that a great mistake had been made. These Martians had come without weapons in their hands, perhaps to negotiate, perhaps even to cooperate with Tibetans in the making of a Mirror for the use of Earthmen, and they had been done to death!

"You have driven the souls of my people from their bodies," said Emdap Muh. "My most loyal lamas wander the spaces of the earth like *duggas!*"

*Duggas* were evil beings, or spirits.

The dying Martian shook his head.

"Had we been received in friendship, as we came, our hearts filled with understanding, and gone away again, your loyal lamas would have been restored to their bodies, by a method which the Great Selfless One knows."

"Then why was your intention not made clear to us?" asked the Living Buddha. "My people lived among you for over a year, in your own world. Surely you must have studied them, the workings of their mind, and have known that once they understood what you had done to their comrades, their first urge would be to slay?"

"Yes, we realized that. But they would not bring us to Your Holiness, where we might have been able to explain, and reach an understanding. They attacked us. . . ."

"Because," said Emdap Muh, horror in his voice, "you forced your way through them, failed in the rituals, toward the person of their spiritual and temporal ruler."

"The result, whatever the explanation given," said the Martian, "is simply this: your people stole the Mirror from us. We came to you, in the only way possible to us, since we have found no way to transport anything material through the Heavyside Layer except that possessed by your representatives, and which they brought back to this planet with them, and we have been slain. We came as friends, and have been destroyed as enemies. Now when the many there are of us who can, come to succeed in that in which we have failed, they will come with devastating weapons. We came to reach an understanding; those who come after us will come to destroy, slay, lay waste! Our people at home know everything that has happened to us."

"How can they know?" said Emdap Muh, startled. "We have possession of the Mirror by which they might see."

"For eons we have possessed a simple mirror for contact with this planet; a mirror incapable of contacting any other, more distant. It was put back into use when the latest Mirror was known to have been brought here. Nothing has escaped our superiors since we left our City of Dorth."

The man seemed to stay alive by a sheer effort of will. But now he had done all he could. He was finished. His head—the head of the lama whom he had displaced—sank on his breast. He died like that. And there was not a living Martian left. I counted the dead in that chamber. There were forty-seven.

**A** SILENCE, grim and horrible, hung over the place.

I whirled on His Holiness. I would not have been surprised had he heaped bitter invective on me. I had done the first killing. If I had not, perhaps the blood-lust would not have been freed among the lamas. But I saw no accusation in the eyes of Emdap Muh. What was done could not be undone. It was too late.

He levelled a command at his people.

"Cleanse this place thoroughly. I shall return to bless it, shortly."

"Your Holiness will continue to live in quarters that have been profaned by the blood of aliens, unbelievers, enemies?" asked one of the lamas.

"The blood that has been spilled is the blood of our own people," said the Living Buddha. "We seem to have slain forty-seven Martians. Actually we have barred from their bodies, forty-seven of our own people. Dying, those forty-seven have

not violated this place, but have hallowed it. They are martyrs to their belief in what we all believe. Get busy with their disposal. Let them be burned, with all the rites of high lamas, and their ashes placed in *chortens* outside the walls, where rest the ashes of our most illustrious. Come, Davies!"

The lamas were laying hands on the dead, even as their ruler finished. Emdap Muh, however, was signaling for us to return to the crypt and to the Mirror of Mars. There was an urgency about him, indicated by his dead-white face, which made me wonder.

I closed the door behind us, though no lama would have dreamed of stepping through it, or even looking through it. Emdap Muh fairly ran down the stairs. At the bottom he raced to the Mirror, began to work its mechanism, which as yet I did not understand, not in the slightest detail.

"If those forty-seven corpses in Dorth," he muttered, "are being re-animated, we have slain no Martians, and will not merit their anger against us—but have slain forty-seven of our own."

I began to understand what troubled him. It was an eerie feeling, as I tried to figure out just what had happened when the Martians had been killed—what had happened when each had breathed his last. Had his Essence sped back across the miles to Mars, back to his proper body, there to resume its normal activity, while planning a return to Earth?

If none of the forty-seven had, what then?

In a few seconds Emdap Muh and I were gazing at those forty-seven Martians who, before, had looked like corpses in a morgue. Would they

rise and go about their business? Side by side we stared at the moveless shapes. Nothing happened. Deep in my imagination, which is sometimes vivid, else I would not be a camera-nut, I thought I could hear the cries, like those of banshees, of forty-seven lost souls—Martian souls, if any they had, marooned through eternity on an alien planet

*Had this happened to those exploring lamas, on Mars, I thought suddenly, the Living Buddhas of Tibet would have turned the Universe upside down, or have come as close to it as they could, to free the souls they so firmly believed in. Since Martians seemed to travel by means of what for lack of a scientific word I must call the soul, how much more important it must be to them to set their own forty-seven free—and to wreak vengeance on those who were at fault!*

Well, and what happened? I'll tell you, for I saw it happen.

Living Martians came into that chamber. How shall I describe them, when there is nothing to which I can really compare them? They looked like huge frogs standing on their hind-legs—even to their pigmentation—except that their heads were so large they were all out of proportion. If size of skull indicated brain development, the Martians were men of intelligence far beyond that of Earthmen. Their clothing was of strange cut, naturally, the cloth having a dull glow like that of phosphorescence. Their pants—if they could be called that—covered their legs and their hips, to a few inches above their buttocks. They wore jackets of the same material—which consisted of sleeves from seven-fingered hands to shoulders, connected by the narrowest of bands across the chest and back. The bands might

have been weirdly formal collars, to support the ungainly head above necks that were almost non-existent.

Those living Martians, a cold savagery in their bulging eyes—which somehow made me think of their Mirror—held something in their hands which looked to be smaller mirrors. What they did looked to be simple enough. Every small boy has used the sun's rays to focus light through a crystal on dry leaves, to see them burst into flame. That's what the Martians seemed to do, except that they focussed the rays on the bodies of their forty-seven.

*Those forty-seven bodies, one after the other, with amazing speed, literally exploded into flame!*

**A**S THOUGH they had known we were watching every move, those living Martians who had destroyed the bodies of their forty-seven, turned those bulbous eyes directly on Emdap Muh and me, held up those strange crystals as though to show them to us.

Then, almost contemptuously, they brushed away the bits of ash which remained of their dead, and lay down in their places. There were but ten of them. But before they had sprawled out and become quiet, fully a hundred more came into that room—and each of them held up one of those Fire Crystals so that we could see it. And each of them turned his bulbous eyes on us, as each in his turn lay down beside his predecessor and became still.

"They're coming, Davies," said Emdap Muh softly. "They're coming for vengeance, and bringing those instruments of annihilation with them! What shall we do?"

"We have no choice," I said, "but to kill or be killed. But this time, my friend, I have an idea they will use



plenty of guile. Here and there throughout Tibet they will select solitary horsemen, displace them, avoid all other Tibetans until they have become so accustomed to being Tibetans, not even a Tibetan can tell the difference. Then, they will strike!"

"How can we possibly combat such a threat?" he asked, despair in his brave young voice for the first time.

"I don't know, but if I am right, we have a little time—perhaps as much as two days, to make counter plans."

As I spoke the grisly thought came to me that the Life Essence of forty-seven Martians already set free of bodies in Tibet, would be making war with the Life Essence of those forty-seven Tibetans, throughout a gruesome eternity!

"Let me think," I went on, trying to force that horrible thought out of my mind as being unalterably unscientific, and succeeding none too well. "Give me a couple of hours alone to plan. During that time, if I had my camera...."

"I shall bring it myself," said Emdap Muh.

"I'll try to get photographs of the Mirror. But I need so many things, to get photos of the intestinal invagination of the thing...."

"Name them! I shall get them. I shall open our borders to airplanes from China and India. I am sure the Dalai Lama, in the circumstances, will permit it. Your materials will be flown in. This is work I had planned for you to do. And you must hurry, should we end by losing the Mirror, so that we may be able to reproduce it from your pictures! If we can keep this one, or make a reproduction, you then have a life-tenure at Godrang if you wish—photographing the wonders brought here by the Mirror!"

I gasped at the possibilities of this struck me. The Mirror was a matchless thing. It was a perfect astronomical instrument, all-purpose. It was a perfect televisior, a perfect radio. There was nothing too large for it to explore, nothing as yet known to science that was too small.

Life work indeed—not only for me, but for as many photographers and interstellar topographers as could work with it at the same time, and without pause, in endless shifts. The Mirror was a key to the Universe, to the Unknowable. It annihilated the light-years. It brought Io or Pluto right to Tibet.

It was a creation only less inconceivable than the secret of the Universe itself.

I began making photographs, developing them as best I could. I had scarcely got started, it seemed to me, before Emdap Muh called down to me from his chambers. I hurried up to him. His quarters showed no signs of the epic struggle that had taken place there.

His face was drawn. He looked to have aged fifteen years or more.

"Nothing seems to have happened anywhere, nothing!" he said. "Twenty-four hours have passed!"

Those twenty-four hours had gone like as many minutes, as far as I was concerned. And I thought of that fact first. Then his words struck me.

*"Nothing whatever has happened!"*

Somehow the implication of those simple words was more fear-invoking than if he had said,

"The military might of Mars is crossing our borders at all points, armed with weapons beyond all earthly ken for destructive power!"

His words suggested a silence that might explode at any moment, and blow off the very roof of the world.

THAT silence was felt, and honored, throughout Godrang. It was broken by a sound never heard before in Godrang. A sound so unexpected that I thought it signified attack from Outside—until I recognized it as something from my world with which I was quite familiar: the droning of airplane motors. Swiftly I explained to Emdap Muh, and together we went out to see what the sound might signify.

We were just in time to see a snug cabin liner land on a level space outside Godrang. The propellers became visible. The door of the plane opened. The first person out of it was a woman.

Even without binoculars I knew that she was white, young, and entrancingly dressed.

I didn't know why this should increase the pall of gloom over Godrang, and over my own spirits, but it did. Godrang was certainly in no mood to entertain a lady from my world—when Godrang, even when not threatened, was a home of celibate lamahood.

A horrible thing happened, when the girl was perhaps a hundred feet from the plane. It burst into brilliant flames. The men with her shouted, turned and ran back, instinctively thinking of saving the ship and their personal belongings. Horror piled on horror when the flames reached out fiery tentacles and engulfed every last one of them.

The girl whirled, saw. Her hands went up to the sides of her head.

Then she dropped limply and flames were reaching out for the body as I raced away from Emdap Muh, toward her. I heard the Living Buddha cry out,

"Bring her to the Palace!"

The words made no sense. I simply ran, like a crazy man, knowing that

what had happened to her companions must not happen to the girl. Tibetans, too, fearfully watching the roaring ship, were running in to help her.

But one man led all the rest. A big man on horseback dashed past her at top speed. He bent from his saddle, shot his arm under her, lifted her, draped across his arm, and rode madly on.

Less than a minute after he had done so, a tongue of flame licked over the spot where she had lain. And when it went back a black, charred pathway led from the spot back to that on which the plane and all its other passengers were turning into ashes—of no more importance now than the ashes of those on Mars whom their fellows had burned with the Fire Crystals.

*Why should I have thought of those two things at the same time?*

The answer to that, with all its implications, was never to be completely mine. But then I did not know it. The girl's rescuer, still with the girl over his arm, was circling back. I went through the gate to meet him. He leaned down, gave the girl into my arms. I raised my eyes to say something to him, to express some sort of thanks for what he had done for a white woman of my world.

I caught a glimpse of his eyes, the hint of a strange smile on his lips.

*In that dreadful instant I knew that the girl's rescuer was a Martian!*

## CHAPTER VI

### DEEMA MORAY

I KNEW the girl instantly. Her name was Deema Moray and she was a horizon-hunting reporter, war correspondent. A good

one, I had to admit, for she scooped the whole world with some of her stories and pictures. I had a slight suspicion that the men she had brought with her had been her staff, and that her chief photographer would have been brought along to do me out of pictures—if her plane hadn't gone up in flames.

Deema Moray, about twenty-five years old, I should say, had interviewed Funston in Pieping, before we had dashed into the Gobi. I hadn't liked her much, and her photographer, some relative, had made light of my picture work. Maybe that was the reason I didn't particularly like her. Besides all this, she was running around doing man's work, and I'd felt that a girl so young and lovely should be doing almost anything else, that would fit her to be a man's wife some day.

As I carried her back toward the Lamasery a lot of wild questions flashed through my mind. That the Martian had fired the plane, that he had intended the destruction of her companions, I felt quite sure. But why had he saved Deema Moray? Was she to be used as I felt the Martians were going to try to use me, to manage the return of their Mirror?

I understood, too, that nothing material could be brought through the Heavyside Layer, so how had the Fire Crystals been brought through? Plainly that fact no longer obtained, or else the Fire Crystals were not what we would call "material," though the Martians had held them up for us to see in the Mirror.

I could think of many places I would have preferred that Deema Moray had landed. And she would think of plenty of places, too, when she regained consciousness and discovered what had happened to her plane and her party.

Those licking tongues of flame which had reached out, as though they had been live tentacles, to destroy her comrades! The single tentacle that had reached out for her, just after the "Tibetan" horseman had rescued her! I hadn't noticed the position of the horseman until he had ridden right up to her, so I had missed entirely, how it had been done. But I hadn't missed the demonstration of power. It was almost as though the Martian had fired the plane, but wished to prove to us that he could rule the fire afterward.

The high-ranking lamas stopped us at the gate. No women were allowed inside the lamasery. However, I informed them that Emdap Muh had instructed me to bring her in, and they finally permitted it. I walked up those cobblestones with her in my arms—and rather enjoying the touch of her, I'll have to admit—while lamas trailed us. Women might be forbidden to celibate lamas, but that didn't keep them from being childishly curious.

They had never seen an American girl before, perhaps never even a white one. I could understand their curiosity, and their disappointment when the Rimpoche imperiously forbade them to follow us into the living quarters of His Holiness.

Emdap Muh did something else that would have scandalized his people. He placed his hand on Deema's forehead. His face held a rapt expression for a moment, as though he were praying. And almost instantly Deema opened her eyes. She grinned at me, which made my heart skip a beat.

"I like it all right, Howard," she said, "but I can stand on my own feet now, thank you."

I knew that the touch of Emdap Muh's hand had restored her to con-

sciousness—no great mystical feat, as many people have a magnetic power in their persons to dispel sickness.

I STOOD the girl on her feet. For the first time she noticed how grave our faces were. I introduced her to the Living Buddha, with whom she was instantly at home, as she usually was with anybody. She charmed His Holiness with her personality. She was the kind of woman who, had she been unscrupulous, could have caused a great deal of damage. Trouble was that I could not be sure that she would not become unscrupulous at any time—and this was certainly no place for any additional disturbing elements.

"What happened?" she asked, as though being received by a Living Buddha were an everyday experience.

I gave it to her brutally. "Your plane exploded into flames and your companions were destroyed. You almost went up in smoke yourself. You would have, but for the fact that a Tibetan horseman rode in and carried you away, with all the surety of a Western cowboy stunt-man."

Her face went very white. She and I were seated on rugs now, and Emdap Muh had taken his place on his dais. Deema swayed and I thought she was going to faint again, but she didn't.

"Poor Charles!" she said, almost instantly regaining control of herself. "He was the world's bravest photographer!"

"What brought you here, Deema?" I asked.

"Two things. The story of your disappearance. The opening of the Tibetan Border to certain airplanes."

I whirled to look at Emdap Muh. What had he done while I was photographing the Mirror? He smiled slightly.

"I have been to Lhasa," he said quietly. "The Dalai Lama has men of the *Kadakh* in India and . . . and . . . other places. Including Chungking."

"I flew here from Chungking," said Deema Moray. "And just what is this mystery about *Kadaks*? I came here, following my nose for news."

Story first, personal catastrophe afterward, that was Deema Moray. She had been shocked to her soul by what had happened to her people, but the story came first. All her equipment had gone up in smoke, but she still had her brains and the ability to write. She would push personal sorrow to the back of her brain until she had got what she had come for.

His Holiness looked at me. I shook my head. Deema Moray was a stickler for facts . . . facts . . . and more facts. There was a story here, all right, and we would need the help of the world before it fully developed. But would the world believe the story? Would even Deema Moray believe it?

I could foresee the answer to that, all right. Deema Moray would think we were all crazy, she would say so in her stories, and the world would laugh at us for fools. Maybe this had been the reason for her rescue. Of course the border could be closed. We could keep Deema from going out, or getting her stories out. But there was one disturbing factor. A dozen countries, during the past four years, had closed their borders to newspaper reporters, including, and especially, Deema Moray. Yet she had slipped past all censorship and scooped the world in every one of them. Snaring Deema Moray, even in the heart of Tibet, where telepathy was the accepted method of transmission of information, was like trying to prevent the landing of the Martians.

But maybe Emdap Muh could see further into people than I could—even an American woman. One of the first things I had said to him was that Deema's rescuer had been a Martian. Now, quite calmly, as though he were passing the time of day, Emdap Muh said to Deema:

"What would you say if I told you that your rescuer was a Martian?"

He said it in Tibetan, and I started to interpret, but Deema held up her hand. I might have known she would have a grounding in all languages she might ever expect to use. She had understood him, and when she answered her Tibetan was at least as good as my own.

"If you, Your Holiness, assured me that the statement was true, I would believe it. You tell me the man was from Mars? The planet Mars?"

Gravely Emdap Muh nodded his head. His hand was busy with his beads.

Deema Moray looked into his eyes for a long moment. Then she looked at me and I knew a miracle had happened. Deema Moray had calmly accepted the unbelievable. And if there was a reporter in the world who could make the world believe what was happening to us, that reporter was Deema Moray. She could have made the most skeptical editor believe that black was white. No essential in any of her stories, since she had become a roving reporter, had ever been disproved.

That Martian, then, had given us a perfect contact with the world beyond the borders of Tibet. And we knew how to get her stories out, easily, with the *Kadakhs*.

Emdap Muh, as though he had read my thought, began to talk to her so rapidly in Tibetan that I could scarcely follow him. He told her about the Mirror. Told her every

thing that had happened to us. He told her the secret of the *Kadakhs*; but he explained that she was not to use that information in any of her stories. The Living Buddha was giving her that piece of information "off the record," trusting her with it. She had, to my knowledge, never betrayed any of her sources of information, a fact which Emdap Muh knew instinctively.

**W**HEN he had done her face was very white. She said to me, calmly,

"Who says I haven't a nose for news, eh? What's to be done?"

That was in English and Emdap Muh did not get the words, though he got the meaning, said,

"A building will be prepared for you outside the lamasery, and a guard of soldiers, responsible to me. I would make a place for you inside the lamasery, but I am afraid my people would object too strenuously to that—and as matters are now, I cannot cause even the slightest friction, when I need the loyalty of everyone within my domain."

I waited. Deema Moray waited.

"I will provide a building large enough that Davies can occupy part of it, and work with you," he said to Deema. "It will be possible for Davies to call on me at any time, and for the lady to call also, if accompanied by Davies."

"And there's no time to lose," I said. "We've got to do a swift job of organizing the Tibetans. The most loyal, the most advanced lamas, in every lamasery in Tibet, must be formed into lamasery groups, their sole task that of ferreting out Tibetans who have been displaced—and destroying them."

"I know what's next," said Deema. "Those men you select, when all is

explained to them, will know at what exact point Martians are trying to displace *them*—and what to do about it!"

"Yes," said Emdap Muh. "They will be ready, instantly, to commit suicide, the only way to refuse their earthly habitations to enemies we should never have made."

One thing I noticed in all this. Emdap Muh did not tell her where the Mirror was. Nor did she ask. Nor do I believe for a moment she had any thought, at that time, of trying to get into the vault, if she had guessed that there was such a place, and where. She was very smart about such things, and she must have known that there were certain secrets even she must not know about.

"Why not simply return the Mirror?" she asked. "If Howard has taken pictures of it, we can duplicate it. I understand that at first the Martians themselves would have helped you to construct a Mirror like theirs."

"But we did not know that," said Emdap Muh. "We slew Martians who came in peace, seeking simple justice. Now we are to be punished. Even if we give up the Mirror we are to be punished; therefore there is no point in giving it up."

Emdap Muh signaled to me. I rose, as did Deema Moray.

The Living Buddha led us to the door, bowed us out, both of us going out backward. Emdap Muh issued brief commands to lamas standing outside, and Deema and I were led out of the lamasery proper, to the house that had been set aside for us.

I needed a few minutes with Deema, I felt. She might have been doing a swell job of acting, so that Emdap Muh would believe she had believed him. I had to know that she was going to play ball.

So I shot the door behind us, waited for the lamas to move away from it as far as their curiosity would permit, and put my back against it, trying to think how to put my doubts into words.

Deema Moray did an amazing thing. She stopped just inside, turned slowly, almost like a woman in a trance, and looked at me.

It came to me with a shock that I had never realized how humanly gorgeous this woman was. That she could be interested in a man like me had never even occurred to me. I could make allowances for all that had happened, and her need for consolation of some sort—and the fact that I was the only man of her race within a thousand miles or more.

That still didn't explain what happened next. She moved to me, put her hands on my shoulders, looked deeply into my yes—and what I saw in her eyes could be interpreted, oh, so easily, as love, *for me!*

"Howard," she said tremulously, "the Tibetans are all wrong in this. I believe every word of it, and not because it's easy to believe anything that happens in Tibet, either. I haven't been here long enough to get wrapped up in their mysticism. But they're wrong, don't you see? They stole that Mirror. And if you help them against the Martians you are definitely and irrevocably on the wrong side of the fence!"

"But you just indicated to Emdap Muh," I said, trying to keep my voice from shaking with an emotion I could not very well define, "that you were wholeheartedly with us. He trusted you with the facts. I did not try to stop him, because I felt you could be trusted, too. Are you trying to tell me that you would even betray him where your stories are concerned?"

"He is wrong," she insisted, her hands gripping my shoulders tightly. "His people are wrong. If the world helps, the world is wrong, and the Martians would be justified in spreading fire and the sword throughout the Earth! Howard, for my sake, give it up. Don't side with them. Throw your weight on the side of the Martians. Let them take back their Mirror!"

"I'VE PROMISED Emdap Muh!" I couldn't help it; I put one arm about her. She did not seem to mind, seemed even to welcome it. I scarcely realized the meaning of all this, for there was something else I knew about Deema Moray—she probably hadn't even so much as kissed a man not a blood relative, since she had been a child in pigtails. She had been too wrapped up in her work to have the slightest interest in men that was not professional. Maybe memory of this was a bell of warning, ringing inside me. But her nearness made it difficult for me to hear.

"You made pictures of the Mirror," she insisted. "From what you tell me the thing is just a globe, a semi-globe, consisting of some element, or combination of elements, unknown to the Earth. It can be duplicated if your pictures are as good as they usually are."

"There's more than that, Deema," I said. "That semi-globe contains the most amazingly intricate set-up of machinery, no single part of which is familiar to me—though some of it is based on photography, which you'll admit I know—you've ever heard about. Not only is it intricate, but in some fashion—I'm *sure*!—that machinery is self-repairing. Can we get all that information from photographs, if we lose the Mirror? With the true Mirror we can search the

stars, listen to their voices. We can study the core of the earth, or of the Moon. We can travel the floors of the seven seas. No, you don't understand...."

"I understand," her voice was low and tense, "that you are refusing to listen to me. And you're the first man, since I was fifteen, and crazy about my father and brothers, I've ever been interested in enough to wish to kiss!"

And she stood on tiptoe, placed her lips against mine, and kissed me. I could not help myself. I pulled her into a hungry, almost savage embrace. Some day, I had always hoped, I would feel this way about a woman....

I got the surprise of my life.

Deema Moray was fighting like a wildcat. She was kicking my shins, hitting me with her tiny fists, drawing away from me. I let her go, not understanding. Her face was a fiery red. Her lips were drawn back from her teeth. Such venom as I had never suspected in any woman, poured from her lips.

"You swine! You cur! How dare you so much as put your hands on Deema Moray? How dare you kiss me? If this is a trick of your marvelous Living Buddha, to make a fool of Deema Moray, you've got another guess coming. If you expect me to share a house, even a big one like this, with a man who grabs me the minute a door closes, you're a bigger fool than I've always suspected. Get out, about your business!"

My mouth must have dropped open to its full extent. I had never got such a shock in my life. And now, here was a new one. Deema Moray held an ugly-looking little automatic in her hand, which she had taken from some place in her blouse, and the muzzle, not wavering in the





*There seemed to be two persons within the casement of Deema Moray.*

slightest, pointed directly at the pit of my stomach. There was no doubt that she meant exactly what she was saying now.

But I had been just as sure she had meant....

Through my mind flashed thoughts

....

The burning plane....

The burning companions of Deema Moray....

Her rescue by a Martian....

That Martian's mocking grin at me....

I dared not put into words what I thought had happened. Besides, she would certainly not listen to me. She only waited for me to get out and, preferably, stay out. That automatic spelled business. She had probably had to draw it on other men in her time—in the rowdy places of the earth, where women were the spoils of war and banditry.

I did say one thing, and my voice was cold and harsh:

"You will stick to us while you are here, whatever you may think of me, Miss Moray. You'll play ball with the Living Buddha."

"Of course I will. He's decent!"

"And you'd better understand that...."

"Get out!"

"No sooner had we entered this room, and I closed the door, than it was *you* who offered your lips! Moreover, you wanted me to take the side of the Martians, *for your sake!* Mull that over, my sweet, while I get on with business that is really important!"

Her face was a study as a turned, went out. I slammed the door. I was plenty mad—and plenty scared, I can tell you! The Tibetans outside, noting my perturbation, grinned, putting their own interpreta-

tion on the little they had heard, and hadn't understood at all.

I WAS like a man possessed as I went out, away from that building.

It was obvious to me that none of this, then, had been chance. Deema's coming here, the death of her companions, her plea with me, and her complete somersault emotionally, in a matter of seconds. Her lips were still warm on mine—and her hand was still hot against my cheeks.

*The Martians, one of them, at least, were already working through Deema Moray!*

Had she been, for a moment, displaced by a Martian? Which was the true Deema Moray, the one who had kissed me, or the one who had slapped me?

Had it been the true Deema Moray who had believed so completely the story Emdap Muh had told her? Had it been the real Deema Moray who had apparently been wholeheartedly with us?

What Deema Moray had it been who had come to this building, been able to see the charred metal parts of her plane, all during the walk from the gate of the lamasery to her assigned quarters—and had apparently given no thought whatever to the horror which had struck down her companions there?

Did I have the slightest knowledge of the real Deema Moray?

This woman had the face, form, height, of Deema Moray. She had come here in the plane Deema Moray used. She had recognized me—though she might have got that from pictures—and had called me by name. Her voice had been the voice of Deema Moray as I remembered it from Peiping, and her interview with Funston.

But there was still her Martian rescuer, what she had said to Emdap Muh, what she had said to me—both before the kiss, and after she had apparently regretted it.

*There seemed to be, without a doubt, two persons within the earthly casement of Deema Moray.*

Which, in the name of all the gods, was the one on whom Emdap Muh and I could depend?

There was another thing: in the moment of that kiss I had really loved the person I had thought to be Deema Moray. It had been something deep down inside me, something which had clamored to me, at the moment we had kissed:

"This is the woman for whom you've been waiting. You did not know it when you met before, nor did she. It took this to make you both realize!"

But just what *was* "this?"

I was halted by a dozen Tibetans, one of whom carried one of those *Kadakhs* on his palms. I looked these lamas over, and knew this was the first contingent for defense of Tibet, and the Mirror. They were reporting to me. I had become, without even being asked, leader or at least organizer, of the forces of Tibet against the Martian invaders.

"We come to you for instructions," said one of them. "We understand that a command from you is a command from Emdap Muh, who states that you are to organize all Tibetans, and swiftly."

"There are many *Kadakhs* like these, in Tibetan hands?"

"Enough," said the spokesman.

"Would there be one in the hands of the greatest of Tibetan bandit leaders?"

"They could be placed so. Or there would be someone who could reach such men."

"And older men who have had experiences in wars along the China Border?"

"There would be some, yes."

A PLAN was forming in my mind. Maybe I was fitted for work like this, because I was *not* fitted for leadership in the usual meaning of the term. Maybe I was being "fed" this plan, bit by bit—perhaps by Emdap Muh, who himself would never directly lead forces which would bring about the deaths of themselves or others.

"Come with me," I snapped. I turned and started to lead them toward the house of Deema Moray. "I'm going to want you to bring me every leader of importance, one at a time, probably, or even in groups. I am going to interview them in the house of the lady!"

A cry of terror burst from one of the lamas. All of us stopped.

We looked toward the heart of the lamasery.

The visitors' house, where I had appeared to the Gelong Tze Gatze, had burst into flames—and *it was almost entirely of stone!*

By the time we had taken a dozen breaths—if any of us had not held his breath in horror and amazement for all that time—that building had vanished from the lamasery, from the earth, and the fire had vanished with it—as *though the fire had not really burned it, but had carried it away into nothingness.*

Here, I knew, was the Martian answer to my plan!

*In that house a Martian had suffered his first indignity—at my hands!*

So, it had been destroyed. And no other building near it had been so much as blackened by the hellish

## CHAPTER VII

## GRIM PREPARATIONS

flames! The flames could be controlled then, by a control beyond the ken of any Earthman.

The Martians could as easily have wiped out the lamasery. That building was of stone—therefore they could have burned down the mountain as easily!

Why was one thing spared, another saved?

I had part of the answer inside me, at once. The Mirror was inside the mountain, and it was very precious. So precious that they did not even trust their perfect control of the Fire Crystals!

I led the way, at a run now, into the house of Deema Moray.

The lamas poured in after me.

"I've got to use this place in our plans," I snapped at Deema, when she whirled on us, fire in her eyes.

"But why *this* house?"

I told her what had happened to the visitors' building in the lamasery. When I had done, she repeated,

"But why *this* house as a headquarters for you?"

The way she said "you" was filled with abysmal contempt. I answered scarcely thinking what I said,

*"Because this house is the safest anywhere in Tibet!"*

The fury on her face changed into such an expression of horror that I could have killed myself for shocking her so. That expression told me something I hadn't even realized when I had spoken—that I had told the simple truth to her....

*That she realized it now, and understood why!*

*The only place that would have been safer would have been close against the Mirror of Mars, in the crypt of hoary records!*

**D**EEMA MORAY did something I'd have wagered she hadn't done in years. She began to cry, but ran into another room before the sobs could come out, giving me a chance to say to the spokesman of the lamas:

"Watch her while we work. There must be no interference."

I trusted he would not understand what I meant; that he would merely take my words to mean that Deema, being a woman, was unpredictable. That, being an outlander besides, anything might be expected of her. I myself was accepted because I was in the good graces of their leader, Rimpoche Emdap Muh.

I decided to give her no time to think and, for all I knew, make herself receptive to the forces from Outside which I was convinced had already tested their will with her—though which of the two "Deema Morays" had been the true Deema Moray, I hadn't the slightest idea. I went to that other room, closed its door behind me.

"Go 'way and leave me!" she said flinging out an arm at me from where she sprawled on a kang. I felt very sympathetic toward her at that moment, but this was no time for softness. I could be tough if I had to, even with a woman whom I might love.

"I'll do nothing of the sort!" I snapped. "You're here to get a story, preferably a series of stories, aren't you?"

Her sobbing became less at that. For a few moments of ghastly realization she had forgotten that she was a newspaper woman. My words made

her remember that, come Hades or high water, or the end of the world, the story was the thing.

"Whether you are or not, we've got to make use of you," I said. "Come out here and see what goes on!"

She dabbed at her eyes with her fists, like a small child. It was hard not to at least pat her shoulder when she stood up after that, and walked past me into the room where the lamas waited for me to begin.

One of the lamas took the *Kadakh* at a signal from me, and held it forth on his outstretched palms.

"I want Wann Ta Chih, *here!*" I said. "I think he'll be waiting for this summons."

The lama with the *Kadakh* manipulated his hands under the cloth, doing something with its border, perhaps "tuning it in." And instantly, in front of him, stood Wann Ta Chih. I turned and looked at Deema Moray. She gasped. It was her turn to gape like a dying fish. But even as she registered her surprise, her hands were busy making pothooks on a pad of paper she had taken from the same place she had taken that pistol she had aimed at me, with a piece of pencil tied to the pad.

Wann Ta Chih, his face very grave, looked at me calmly, said:

"I am here, Howard Davies. What shall I do?"

"He came from my camp in the Gobi, *instantly!*" I told Deema Moray. "Does that give you something to start with?"

"And how!" she said, inelegantly, while I turned back to Wann Ta Chih.

"Martians," I told him, "are sifting through the Heavside Layer into Tibet. They leave their bodies on Mars, and take up their abode in the bodies of selected Tibetans...."

I didn't have to go into details, or offer explanations to a Gelong of Tibet, whose whole life was based on belief in the soul and its peregrinations through eternity.

He nodded at once.

"A Martian may select you to displace," I went on. His face changed slightly, then became stern and set. "I do not know what becomes of your own soul if this happens. But you will know it is happening, I am sure, especially since I have warned you. If the Martian gains possession, and starts attacking Tibetans, Tibetans have no choice but to slay—thus destroying the earthly abodes of Tibetan spirits."

Understand I don't vouch for this. Tibetans believe such things. I had to talk in terms they would understand—and probably knew a lot more about than any of our famous scientists.

"Therefore," I went on, "if you feel yourself being displaced—and a Martian was able to displace the Gelong Tze Gatze!—what will you do?"

"Destroy myself," he said calmly. A terrific resolve for a Tibetan to make, when Tibetans believe so firmly that if a man takes the law of life into his own hands, he becomes 'earthbound' until he shall have spent his allotted time on earth. Yet Wann Ta Chih did not hesitate. "Yes, I will destroy myself."

"And if any of your men behave strangely?"

I could see his lips shape the Tibetan for "Thou Shalt Not Kill." But when they had done so, he said: "He will be destroyed. There is no other way, and the cause is more holy than life."

"Good! You will organize your men when you get back, explaining as much to them as you think proper.

You will band them together, and their task will be to rove Ngolokwa, hunting down solitary Tibetans, or even Tibetans in groups of two, three and four, and investigating them—and killing them if the investigation be not satisfactory. First, even though you may be convinced that the rovers pass muster, search them. If they are Martians they will be carrying pieces of glass, or something that looks like glass, resembling this—maybe larger, maybe smaller. If they possess such instruments, they are Martians and must be slain!"

I showed him the crystal of my watch. There are few watches in Tibet, and no ordinary Tibetan would possess one.

Wann Ta Chih nodded.

"Back to your men!" I snapped. And Wann Ta Chih was gone. The doors of the house were all closed, and though I knew what happened, at least as far as my own eyes could explain it, it was certainly weird. One second Wann Ta Chih stood there, in the flesh; next instant his place was utterly empty—except for just a small item: there were several grains of sand that had escaped from his boots, Gobi sand, reddish and unmistakable!

**I** COULD hear the pencil of Deema Moray, hurrying over the pad of paper.

"Who else?" I asked the lama spokesman. "You suggest someone. I know few Tibetans of importance."

"The leader of the lamasery soldiery, of the Lamasery of Shigatze," said the lama. "The chances are that he will be admiring his *Kadakh*!"

"Bring him!"

The man with the *Kadakh* turned carefully, and I knew that he was

facing toward Shigatze. I don't know how he turned the thing in for distance and identity. I do know that another man, who made me feel good because he looked every inch a soldier, stood in that room with us.

I didn't get his name. It was enough that I knew his job. Briefly I explained my authority. Then I instructed him substantially as I had instructed Wann Ta Chih. When I had finished he agreed, as Wann Ta Chih had agreed, but he stipulated:

"To save time I would like for my under-officers to have their instructions direct."

I looked at the lama with the *Kadakh*. He nodded. And the soldier from Shigatze stepped aside. Another soldier took his place, stepped away when he recognized his superior. Another. Another. Until there were a dozen Tibetans in the room, when I swiftly repeated my instructions, and their superior said calmly:

"This comes indirectly from the Dalai Lama, at Lhasa!"

Grimly, without hesitation, these men—who by so doing believed they might be condemning themselves to future lives of purgatory—agreed to what must be done. Then, one by one, their superior waiting to the last, they stepped up to the man with the *Kadakh*, thrust their palms under it—and vanished. Just so, I knew, were they, in rotation, appearing before another *Kadakh* in Shigatze, and carrying on with their work—and laying the ground work for what I had told them must be done.

Their superior went.

Then, as the lama spokesman rattled off names and places, which indicated most of the important lamaseries in Tibet, with their soldier captains, those captains appeared be-

fore me, received their instructions, and were gone.

When I felt I had done enough, I looked at my watch. It had been less than an hour since I had brought Wann Ta Chih here for a conference!

I called Deema Moray's attention to that fact.

"And this minute," I said, "all Tibet is marshalling for as strange a war as was ever waged anywhere—though the main struggle will be right here, at the Lamastery of Godrang."

"Then why the armed forces other places?" she asked.

She had had plenty of experience with military stuff, and her question was a good one.

"The Martians," I explained, "may bring pressure to bear on Godrang, by raising hob with lamasteries all over Tibet. It's just a precaution. And I doubt if this place were surrounded by soldiers, miles in all directions, that we could prevent death and destruction from exploding in our faces."

"But suppose we *could* do something by a concentration of force here?"

"You just saw what happened. We could bring men here as fast as an army could march through a pass single file. And we could use two, three, or a dozen *Kadakhs* at the same time."

I turned to the lamas assigned to duty with me, said,

"You heard what I said to the others. The same applies to you. Your duty is to guard Godrang, with your lives, literally. . . ."

"And with our souls," said their spokesman. The others all nodded. I had noted an odd circumstance about all this. Not one Tibetan of any rank had hesitated to offer his life *and his soul*, that the Mirror

might remain in Tibet. A Living Buddha was abetting the theft, and that was enough for them, whatever their rank. Just as they turned to go, the spokesman said to me,

"You mentioned the crystal, like glass. It reminds me of something. You see, I was one of the lamas who went to Mars, over a year ago, spent considerable time there. We brought back many crystals like the one you mentioned! A *great* many of them, in fact! We gave them away, as curiosities, to whoever wanted them!"

A SURGE of horror went through me. Deema Moray cried out. The secret, then, was out at last. The Martians could bring nothing material through the Heaviside Layer, intact, so they had sent those Fire Crystals through with the returning Tibetans, in the shape of mementoes—and the Tibetans had never known what they were, or what they were for!

"Do you know," I asked hoarsely, "who received those crystals? Did the Gelong Tze Gatze have one?"

"Yes. I gave him one myself. I've kept one—if it hasn't been stolen from my cell! As for what happened to others, I do not know. I doubt if any of my co-workers on Mars, know."

"Or how many came back with you?"

"Hundreds!" he said.

I waved him out of the room. I was speechless. I turned on Deema Moray, who was furiously writing, but looked up when I whirled.

"So!" she said. "The Martians were Greeks bearing gifts, eh? Or giving gifts. Every Tibetan who has one of those things, is in direct contact, without knowing it, with Mars, and Martians, as surely as posses-



sors of *Kadakh*s are in contact. The Martian has but to make his spiritual transfer—or whatever you want to call it—and there it is.”

“Yes,” I replied. “And I suppose, being a good newspaper woman, you get the implications of those gifts?”

“Yes. They were given to the Tibetans at intervals, *before the Tibetans returned to earth, and certainly before they had the slightest intention of stealing the Mirror*. Therefore it follows, as day follows night, that the Martians used those Tibetans as dupes; that they intended all along to come to the Earth, for some reason or another—and that the gab about friendship they peddled to Emdap Muh was strictly the old malarkey!”

“Exactly. They’d been wanting to come to earth. There had been no way for them to land their Fire Crystals on earth. The Tibetans obligingly shot rockets to Mars—the Tibetans providing their own two-way passage by loading the rockets with *Kadakh*s—followed the rockets, and the Martians had a perfect way to get their own transportation setup arranged between Mars and the Earth!”

“And fate played a trick on the Martians, when the Tibetans stole their Mirror. . . .”

“And the Tibetans were thus provided with an instrument which might mean not only the salvation of the world, but might prove to be the only way the outside world of Earth could save Tibet from destruction! *Now*, what do you think about the right and wrong of things? Emdap Muh must have realized intuitively that right was on his side, even when he couldn’t justify that theft by anything he had ever learned!”

“But even when it was a matter of

theft,” said Deema, “I was on the side of Emdap Muh—and you.”

I looked at her. She seemed to have forgiven me for what had happened before. But I couldn’t be sure. Tibet was filled with strange and powerful alien forces.

I had had the lamas leave the *Kadakh* with me. I now draped it over the edge of the *kang*, and told Deema to touch it at frequent intervals, during the next couple of hours—which I would spend, though I did not tell her that exactly, in the crypt where the Mirror was. I simply told her I was going to a forbidden place, and that I might take her there for safety, or bring her if there seemed any reason why the ancient secret of the place should be given to her.

She nodded, though she regarded the *Kadakh* askance, uncertainly.

I started out. I got to the door when she called my name. I turned. She flung herself into my arms, sobbing. She clung to me. She wanted my arms around her.

“Oh, Howard, I’m terrified, and I’ve never been afraid before! Take me away from here. Don’t leave me alone. Keep your arms about me.”

**I** TRIED to pull away from her. It must be plain why. I could not know just what went on inside this woman whom the Martians must have selected for some purpose. She had a watch, with a crystal. No telling whence it had come! But I did not ask her for it, as I should have, perhaps. I didn’t want to upset her any more than she already was.

“I’ve got a job to do,” I told her, disengaging her arms. “Remember about the *Kadakh*.”

She raised her face. I looked deeply into her eyes.

“Kiss me and forget,” she said softly.

Well, who can blame me for kissing her, when I felt the way I did about what I thought to be, or hoped was, the real Deema Moray? It was warm and nice. I turned then and went out the door. She closed it behind me.

Then, laughter came from that room....

*Strange, terrible, mocking laughter.*

I whirled and went back inside. She was walking away from the door. She turned and when she heard me, rushed to me, holding out her arms.

"I knew you'd come back," she said exultantly. "I knew it was real!"

"I came back," I said softly, "on account of that strange laughter."

She kissed me. Then she drew back, looked sincerely and genuinely puzzled.

"Laughter?" she repeated. "*What laughter?*"

What could I do? About the watch for instance? If I took it, or hunted through her effects for a Fire Crystal, and carried it away, I would then be removing from her person the very thing which insured that, whatever might happen in Tibet, her life would be spared.

I was like a madman as I turned and rushed back to the quarters of Rimpoche Emdap Muh. She herself hadn't heard that laughter I had heard; *yet she had been alone in that room.* For the brief moments of that laughter then, she had been where....where....wherever the Gelong Tze Gatze was at this moment!

The laughter rang in my ears, all the way to the palace of the Living Buddha, into his quarters, where he paced back and forth before his dais, waiting for me.

Without a word he led the way into the crypt, to the Mirror of

Mars. I hesitated only long enough to pick up a *Kadakh* from his dais.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE FIRE CRYSTALS

**W**E HAD taken every precaution of which we could think, and both of us felt that they were not enough. There was so little we knew, really, about the Fire Crystals. For instance, that plane had been destroyed with one of them, though the day had been dull and gray, the sun invisible. The flame from the Crystals must be engendered in some other way. Tibetans could not use accidentally those which had been brought back by them from Mars, for until the visitors' room had gone up in flames, no report of any such fire anywhere in Tibet had ever been made. It apparently needed the ministrations of an initiate—namely, a Martian—to make the things work.

I suppose by patient study, Emdap Muh had been able to learn what he knew about the Mirror—though what he still did not know implied an infinity, almost, of knowledge which might be gained from it in future. That the Martians were much further advanced than Earthmen, the Mirror itself seemed to prove. Yet by the use of it, Earthmen could advance.

In the crypt, Emdap Muh turned to me, talked rapidly for a moment.

"It was not urge for riches," he said, "that made me desire to keep the Mirror, nor yet desire to possess all the knowledge it could bring me personally. No, there was more than that. I believed, I still believe, that through the Mirror, Tibet can eliminate sickness from the world—be-

cause with the Mirror I can look at the nature of the sickness. I can see germs so small that science has not yet seen them. I planned to do that."

He hesitated for a moment, as though to let his great purpose sink into my consciousness, to emphasize the greatness of his desire to serve.

"I further hope to be able to banish war from the world, with the Mirror," he went on. "I'll explain, roughly, how. Tibet is of interest to the whole world, not only because it has been known for centuries as the Forbidden Land, not only because of its mystic background; not only because the belief is common in many quarters that it is the real cradle of the human race, but because it is a rich country, as such things are regarded outside Tibet. We have tons of gold. Our mountains contain yet other tons. The world covets that. Therefore, whatever the motive that might make great men receive an emissary from the Dalai Lama, there probably isn't a powerful leader in the world who would *refuse* to receive such an emissary. . . ."

"And you could be watching that emissary through the Mirror!" I said.

"Yes."

"The emissary would give presents," I said excitedly, "accompanied by a *Kadakh* . . ."

He smiled, nodded.

"Yes. Then, at will, or whenever that man touched the *Kadakh*, I could bring him here—and keep him until he listened to reason. I could take such a man and teach him many things. I could send him back to his work—*taking with him the knowledge that I could watch everything he did thereafter*. Not even the rulers of great nations would do some

of the things they do if they knew their every move watched, their every thought read . . ."

"Their every thought read?" I asked. "But how . . ."

"I haven't found the answer yet," he said, "but I am sure that there is a thought-track in the Mirror somehow, that I can tune in to human thought as surely as I can tune in to human deeds. And thoughts, you know, are things, thought-forms, before they are things that everybody can see or touch!"

And I had thought first of what riches, prestige and power this Martian Mirror placed in the hands of its possessor! I felt thoroughly ashamed of myself. Emdap Muh had not meant to rebuke me, I think, but only to clarify his position. Now he shrugged the whole thing away, and turned his attention to the Mirror.

**W**E began then a careful, minute examination of the face of that strange world known as Tibet. The Mirror's Infinite Potential eye played over the face of Tibet as a ray of sunlight plays over the earth. In that Mirror, in one distant section of Tibet, I saw a Tibetan funeral—I saw the family doing that which needed to be done, to deliver up the flesh of the dead to "the gods of the air," namely, vultures. And I heard the lamas who officiated stand on a high place, heard them calling out,

"Come, gods of the air! Come gods of the air, for a man has gone into the spirit, and his body is to be consumed."

I saw the vultures, the lammergiers, swoop down out of the murky sky, and settle near the dead, close in . . .

The picture changed as Emdap

Muh moved the Mirror slightly. I saw a line of horsemen, seven in number, riding up a long incline, with a precipice on their right leading up to infinity, an abyss on their left reaching down into what seemed to be the darkness of bottomless space. I saw the faces of those Tibetans, with the blizzard sweeping against them from the heights.

I saw the leader of the horsemen, struck by a sudden gust, sway toward the abyss, causing his horse to lose its balance. I saw horse and rider go over. I heard the scream of the man, and the scream of the horse. And, what seemed to be long later, I heard the bodies strike, almost together. I could have seen the result, if I had wished to look upon so gruesome a thing. But, mind you, this was all as clear as though I had been one of the seven riding. For I heard the blizzard, too, and it was so real the chill of it seemed to have crept into the crypt of ancient records.

Emdap Muh showed me a monastery of Mangshan, high on a peak—a peak so high that a lake of clouds surrounded the lamasery, and the lamasery seemed to be swimming on that lake of clouds. The clouds hid abysses beyond the conception of man, for they filled valleys in the world's highest mountains.

I don't know just what caused Emdap Muh to adjust the Mirror so that we could see inside that lamasery, but he did. Maybe he knew the Lamasery. Maybe he knew the man whose face appeared in the Mirror, the man who held high rank in that lamasery....

A man who, absent-mindedly, tossed up and caught....

One of the Fire Crystals!

The man's face was rapt, intent. He was alone in a room, a big room.

A swift panorama of other rooms showed us that the lamasery was filled with lamas. Then Emdap Muh switched back to the one who held the Fire Crystal.

That man suddenly began to behave as the Gelong Tze Gatze had behaved. He stiffened, as though a sudden pain had struck his body. His free hand crept up to his throat. His face took on a greenish tint. His tongue protruded.

In spite of myself I cried out: "Destroy yourself. Don't let him displace you!"

But he could not hear, did not know that the Fire Crystal spelled his doom. I saw him become a Martian. I heard Emdap Muh groan in agony. The man with the Fire Crystal looked at it. It was no longer a plaything, something with which to exercise fingers that were accustomed to the telling of beads. It was an instrument of destruction, and the *thing* that now held it, *knew!*

The man....

"The Gelong Rap Sodu!" said Emdap Muh. "It got him before he could realize what was happening."

Rap Sodu, as Emdap Muh had called him, stared at the Fire Crystal. Then he turned the curved side of it toward the wall of the room in which he sat. His fingers crawled over the rim of the thing, touching something, activating the horror.

Instantly a hole was burned through the wall. Rap Sodu rose, a strange grim smile on his face, and walked through that hole.

**E**MDAP MUH changed the focus of the Mirror, to show us merely the outside of the Lamasery of Mangshan, drifting there above its ocean of white clouds. It looked, for just a minute ago, as it had before. Then, it burst into hellish flames, all

through its extent. I saw lamas come boiling out of it, into a snow-storm. I saw tendrils of flame reach out and catch them.

I saw others it did not catch, saw them plunge into the lake of clouds, to fall endlessly, thousands of feet onto unseen rocks below. I heard their cries.

I saw hermits, in the caves outside the lamasery, naked hermits who were undergoing the unbelievably arduous work of conditioning their minds and their spirits to their future religious work, exposed to view when flames burned away the rock walls which had been cemented over the mouths of their caves.

I saw hermits destroyed—in a land where hermits are almost worshipped, and definitely feared by ordinary Tibetans because of their ways of living.

Emdap Muh waited only a minute or two, and I saw why. One man came out of the flames, walking calmly, once in awhile looking back.

He was, or had been, the Gelong Rap Sodu!

He had done his hellish work, and was walking away from it, to do more.

The Living Buddha took the *Kadakh* from my hand, raced back up the stairs, while I took over the Mirror myself. I knew what he was going to do—bring someone to his quarters, from somewhere, and give him orders to destroy Rap Sodu. And even in our extremity he was not going to bring that executioner into the crypt of the ancient records.

In five minutes he came back, his face very grave.

"May I be forgiven," he said. "I have just given orders to slay a man!"

"A Martian," I said.

"But by slaying him I shut the

Gelong Rap Sodu away from his body," he said grimly. "And before we have done, I shudder to think how many more of our people will be disposed of in this manner."

He had, in the five minutes since his departure, brought someone to him from clear across Tibet, from somewhere close to the Lamasery of Mangshan, and sent him back again, with a command to destroy a certain Martian.

"No reason to feel guilty," I said, and explained to him how, by sending those Fire Crystals to earth with the Tibetans, three months before, the Martians were proved out of hand, guilty of the intent to betray.

"I know," he said. "But the fact that they were sinful does not justify sinning on my part!"

He was utterly sincere.

I did not dare tell him that I had seen a host of soldiers mustered outside another monastery whose name I did not know, but which was some distance from Godrang—and that I had seen the whole organization, to the number of thousands, licked up by what looked to be one sheet of flame.

"Emdap Muh," I said, "I wish to bring Deema Moray to the crypt. It is very important. We must have help from outside Tibet."

He looked at me for a long moment. I think his faith in his own beliefs must have been slipping from him, even though he did not yet know what I did. For he shrugged, and himself held the *Kadakh*. Deema Moray must have been clinging to the other *Kadakh*, waiting, for instantly she stood there in the Crypt with us.

"How did it feel, being yanked through hundreds of feet of solid rock?" I asked.

She had, of course, felt nothing

except that dizzy first sensation which I remembered—that feeling as of being sucked into a terrific vortex, spinning at infinite speed. Then, she found herself with us.

"Deema," I said, "you've got to go out, convince people somewhere what is happening to us. Emdap Muh, find some of your *Kadakh*s beyond your borders, and use all your powers of telepathy to make those who possess them take them in their hands."

He understood at once, of course, since this was his line more than mine.

"Urga first," he said.

"How about Funston, my leader, in the Gobi. He has no plane, but he is a scientist, and he has rifles."

"The Gelong' Wann Ta Chih will have made use of him by now," said the Living Buddah. "Nobody in Urga. There are three *Kadakh*s there. I switch to Turkestan, to Chugushack, where there is a detachment of soldiers, with an airplane...."

That didn't work either. The Mirror showed that the plane had gone. Thousands of miles away, hundreds anyway, nothing less than a plane could have brought us help from Chugushack.

"Try Darjeeling," I said desperately. "Isn't there anyone there who has one of your *Kadakh*s?"

He thought a moment. "Yes, a British Colonel who came into Tibet seven years ago. If he is still in Darjeeling...."

**H**E shifted the Mirror. Darjeeling. A panorama of the city, as Emdap Muh hunted for a building the Colonel must have described to some Tibetan, a description which had been relayed finally to Emdap Muh. He stopped, focussing on a

building. He focussed on its interiors.

"There he is, just finishing dinner," said Emdap Muh. "He has guests. Oh, Colonel Cranshaw, if only there were some way to get you to pick up the *Kadakh*! If only you were responsive to telepathy."

The Colonel was talking, bragging a bit, and we could hear every word he said, every word that his guests said in answer. And as though in answer to our wish, the Colonel said, "And I spent several months in Tibet, y'know! Deucedly cold place, rather! Queer customs no end, too. Like the custom of the....what's that piece of silk they tender with presents, m'dear?" he said to his wife.

"Never mind the name," she said. "But you can show it to your guests. It's very lovely."

"Quite right, M'dear! Quite right! Let's all go into my study."

I whirled on Deema Moray, studied her closely for a few moments. Was she an American woman in this moment, or a Martian monstrosity? I could not be sure. I had to take a chance.

"Here," I said, "hold the *Kadakh*, opposite my hands! You're taking a trip to Darjeeling. You'll know what to say, but get that Colonel going. Tell him what's what...."

"I know," she said. "I can handle old lads like the Colonel."

"Ready?" said Emdap Muh. "He's holding the *Kadakh* now!"

The Living Buddha jumped to stand to my right, between Deema Moray and myself. His hands touched the *Kadakh*. Deema Moray was gone. Both the Living Buddha and myself whirled back to the Mirror.

And there was Deema Moray, smiling.

ing at the flabbergasted Colonel in Darjeeling, and his equally flabbergasted guests.

"I'll explain as we go along, Colonel," she said. "There isn't a moment to lose...."

"Now," I said to Emdap Muh, "all we have to do is to hold the fort until Deema Moray can stir up the world."

Deema could not hear, of course, nor see. But her face turned toward us, and she lifted up her hand in a kind of salute. Then I saw her take the Colonel's *Kadakh*, which everybody else seemed to have forgotten, and tuck it into her blouse.

"My round trip ticket," she said to Emdap Muh and me, words that must have been the sheerest gibberish to the Colonel and his guests. "Don't leave me out of the picture too long. I'm missing you already, Howard!"

How I wished, in that moment, to be sure that the real Deema Moray was speaking; to know that it was herself who missed me, not a Martian who mocked me by saying so! Moreover, a Martian in her position could turn our Tibetan world topsy-turvy.

But Rubicon had been crossed.

**D**EEMA MORAY must convince the outside world, stir it into action. Emdap Muh and myself must do a terrific work here, to save even a part of Tibetan culture—perhaps the world's oldest.

"Greetings, Living Buddah of Godrang!" said another, a third voice, there in the crypt where no third voice had any business to sound. "As one of the Great Selfless Ones, it delights me to see again the Mirror of my people!"

I whirled, and Emdap Muh whirled.

Standing against the wall opposite the foot of the stairs, was the Martian who had rescued Deema Moray

from the fire that had burned her plane and her companions.

He was here, in the forbidden crypt of Godrang.

And he couldn't have come past us down those stairs, couldn't have reached the head of the stairs through loyal lamas who guarded all of Godrang.

Yet, here he was.... and there was no other entrance to the crypt, save by means of one of those *Kadaks*.

And anyone may rest assured that neither Emdap Muh nor myself had summoned this member of the Great Selfless Ones!

"I am equally delighted," said the Martian, in excellent Tibetan, "with the mission on which you have sent the lovely Deema Moray. That is, I imagine she is lovely by *your* standards, however ugly she may be by those of my home land! *We ourselves could not have chosen a better task for her to do!*"

For the first time I saw a Living Buddha lose his poise, heard terror in his voice as he said,

"*May the ancient gods of our people deliver us from destruction!*"

In his terror, Emdap Muh had toppled back down all the spiritual steps he had ascended, into the depths of pagan devil-worship and sorcery. And the Martian must have realized, for he laughed, and his laughter was hideous, because it was not done with his own vocal cords, but with those of the Tibetan whom he had displaced—who must seldom in his life have had occasion to laugh.

How had the Martian penetrated into the crypt? And if one could do it, why might not every last one of the invaders do the same thing?

"I am in no hurry," he said, "to do what I came to do. There is punishment yet, to be meted out."

He walked toward us without fear.



I did not guess his intention until he had touched the *Kadakh*—and there were only myself and Emdap Muh again, in the crypt of records!

Somewhere then, outside the Lamasery of Godrang, a Martian possessed one of those *Kadakh*s—and thus the ability to appear wherever any other *Kadakh* might be!

## CHAPTER IX

### WHAT ABOUT DEEMA MORAY?

THE MOST sickening thing of all was our inability, even that of Emdap Muh, with all his training, to locate the Martians, or discover where they would strike next, unless one of them like the rescuer of Deema Moray, appeared to us. There was one little item in connection with that one, however, that I found puzzling: while he had left by making use of the *Kadakh* in the chamber of records, he had not come by use of the *Kadakh*, else he would have "appeared" with his hands in contact with it. Obviously even with the body of a Tibetan to hamper him, he had been able to move through a plane—and thus through the sides of a mountain—which we did not understand, and which might be another dimension yet to be explored by our scientists. Beyond this I could not go because my knowledge did not extend far enough. Emdap Muh explained it by "projection," but I could not accept projection of personality because, to me, it was not scientific. Besides, that rescuer had been no thought-form projection, but a flesh and blood Tibetan—manipulated in some strange way by the Martian who rode his body as Sinbad was ridden by the Old Man of the Sea.

I had to leave that problem unsolved for the moment. But there

were certain things that ran through my head, filling me with doubts. The Martian had been so delighted, apparently, with the job we had given Deema Moray. He had said he couldn't have planned a better assignment for her himself.

And our motive had been to contact the outside world, and through such contact, to bring help to Tibet when we wished.

That I was also being used by the Martians I felt sure.

But how could this be possible, when Deema was out to bring help, and I was working hand-in-glove with Emdap Muh? The latter wanted photographs of the inner workings of the Mirror. I was taking them, every chance I had. We both expected that Deema Moray would marshal the world for the aid of Tibet.

How, then, could our work be so satisfying to Martians?

It was an enigma beyond us; yet the nagging doubt was there. That Martian had been so sure of himself, so pleased with the way things were working out. Emdap Muh and I had been so pleased, and still were, with the plans we were making and had made, for the safety of Tibet.

Obviously someone was playing into the hands of someone else. Were we playing into the hands of Martians, or were Martians playing into our hands? If I brought forces from many nations into Tibet, to protect it, would I be bringing them to their own destruction? I doubted it—for it was the Tibetans who were to be punished. Tibet and the Tibetans. Here, though I did not realize it—nor did the Living Buddha, was the key to the whole riddle. The answer was simple when it came, as answers usually are. But at the time of the problem's posing we could find no answer—only that gnawing doubt. And

before we could weary ourselves too much with it, Emdap Muh turned the Mirror on Godrang and the surrounding territory. He could scarcely be blamed for his concern for his own domain.

He knew, and I knew, that the biggest trouble we faced was the ferretting out of the Martians.

We had not seen the Martian or Martians who had burned down the Visitors' building. We had not seen, or I had not, the Martian or Martians who had destroyed a whole detachment of Tibetan soldiers, at a monastery I could not name, and about which I had said nothing to Emdap Muh, the Living Buddha already having enough over which to trouble himself.

Down to us, there in the crypt, after the departure of the Martian, and after a brief despairing discussion of the whole matter, trying to find the holes in our plans which the words of the Martian had hinted at, came cries from the heart of Godrang.

Emdap Muh trained the Mirror. Then, with a cry of horror, he turned it off, and led the way up those stairs again, traveling so fast I could scarcely keep pace with him.

In a few moments we were standing on the verandah from which he was wont, on nice days, to look out over Godrang, and much of the territory which he ruled—and looking at the handiwork of the Martians. First, even as I saw what was happening, I was conscious that the very atmosphere was alive, as though its atomic structure were being agitated by some terrific magnetic force. I saw it affect the Tibetans throughout Godrang, and the Tibetans outside the lamasery—and freeze them all to helpless immobility. It crackled, as the Aurora sometimes crackles

across cold snow on an icy winter evening.

Electrical, then, were the Fire Crystals. I tried to imagine how they could be worked. I could think of nothing, except the manner in which a crystal is screwed into a watch. The Crystals, it struck me, were two pieces of something that looked like glass, stuck together by suction, caused by twisting and excluding the air. But in between those two pieces of whatever-they-were—some Martian element of which I knew nothing—there were radioactive elements of terrific power. All a Martian had to do, almost literally, to bend the electrons and atoms of the Universe to his will, was to move the two pieces, in relation to each other, in some way that only the Great Selfless Ones knew. After that he had but to direct the vast power he thus unleashed.

**L**ATER, a sketchy explanation proved that I was right, as far as I went—and that I lacked the intelligence, being only an Earthman, to go further. Nor, perhaps, would I have understood had it been explained in detail—any more than the finite mind can comprehend the First Cause.

However, I felt that power, there on the verandah of the palace of the Living Buddha, the Rimpoche Emdap Muh.

And shortly thereafter amid the deepest, most menacing silence I had ever experienced, I saw it at work. First, out of the north, a sheet of flame, like a dart of lightning, struck just beyond the outer wall of the lamasery. And when I saw wall, I mean the entire wall, all the four sides of the lamasery—thus showing the power of control the Martians held over their lethal weapon. It

was, in effect, a box barrage of fire. It dropped down, a vast rectangle, and smote the earth all outside the walls. And for a brief moment we inside the lamasery were as completely enclosed by the flame, as man *seems* to be enclosed by the dome of the sky and the horizon. A vast globe of flame, settled over us. Through it I, at least, could see nothing—noting but the flame itself. I heard Emdap Muh muttering *man-tras*, and knew that he could see nothing, either. We inside the lamasery were definitely cut off from those outside, by that cone of flame from—we both knew—Martian Fire Crystals.

It lasted for only a couple of minutes. I do not think those of us inside the cone could have endured it longer than that, for we felt as though in the grip of a disintegrating force beyond all conception of mortal minds.

Then, as swiftly as it had come, it was gone. But it had done its work. All around Godrang was a moat. I could not tell how deep it was. There was no water in it. Its walls were ebon from the burning. That moat said plainly, to all those outside it,

*"This is a bar between all of you and the Lamasery, and the Living Buddha whom you worship!"*

Knowing Tibetans I could conceive of no greater punishment than this for run-of-the-mill Tibetans, every last one of whom is so deeply religious. Nor for the Living Buddha himself, whose life and spirit were nurtured by the love, respect and worship of his subjects.

That moat was far more than a moat barring the common Tibetan from the spiritual Master. It was a symbol by which the rulers and the ruled were cut off, one from another.

And the Tibetans would not have

it—though they understood, I knew on the instant.

Some of those nomads out there could not believe that anything could separate them from their Living Buddha—if he wished to be close to them, as all their lives they had been taught he did wish, spiritually if not physically. A round score of them set up a terrific shout of defiance. They gathered on a knoll, opposite the gate, on their swift ponies. It was obvious, what they intended to do. They reined their ponies' heads toward the gate.

They swung toward the gate at full gallop, as though they were charging an enemy. They lacked only their rifles and their long spears—each of them seemed instinctively to realize that neither rifles nor spears would suffice against an enemy who could bring down fire from heaven—to seem to be attacking an enemy force.

They made a brave show as they charged. Emdap Muh cried out,

"Go back! Go back! In the name of our Masters, go back, my children! My poor, brave children!"

They did not hear. With their people shouting encouragement to them, how could they hear? With Emdap Muh so upset that his voice seemed to drop over the verandah rail into a bottomless abyss, how could they hear? I watched them, almost praying for their success—though just what they would prove by jumping that ebon moat, or what they could do when they were inside the lamasery, I did not know.

But they needed this victory, and with all my heart I "pulled" for them to gain it.

The twenty horses, neck and neck, approached that black pit which encircled their lamasery—and their Living Buddha. Your Tibetan horse-

man, riding at full gallop, swings his arms, shouts, laughs, and lives at his peak of excitement. But no sound came from those twenty, nor any unnecessary movements of their bodies. They were so grimly intent on just one thing—clearing that moat and entering the Lamasery. Even the drumming of the hoofs of their ponies seemed to be cushioned by the intoneness of everyone who waited in that awful silence, for whatever to happen that was due to happen.

How does one tell it? Perhaps in the simplest language. Trying to explain the impossible simply means trying to make it more difficult to understand. This is what *seemed* to happen:

A sheet of flame appeared like a vast cleaver, out of the bottom of the moat, rising up before those horsemen. The only thing to which I can liken it, so that everybody will understand what it *looked* like, is to remind everyone of those hoops, sometimes afire, through which horses and riders jump in the circus.

But when the horsemen struck it, there was a subtle difference.

*They did not pass through it!*

They went into it—thinner than a knife-edge though it looked to be—and did not come out the other side, nor even show so much as the ears of a single pony on the other side. They went into it and vanished—at full gallop, the whole twenty of them!

No sooner had we seen this happen, than the fire was gone, as mysteriously as it had come.

**N**OTHING remained by the moat, still a symbol of the unbridgeable defense against anything and everything whatever.

For a full minute there was utter,

dumbfounded silence throughout Gocrang.

Then cries of terror rose from those beyond the gate, and the lamas within. The lamas began to run about like ants disturbed in a hill, seeking a place in which to hide.

The common Tibetans, beyond the gate, began to flee in all directions, like refugees from a country being invaded. But they went at top speed, and none seemed to think of his neighbor. No man, on a pony, thought to lower the hand for a brother even, to pull him up behind him on the pony, to help him to escape. Instead, in their terror, the mounted Tibetans struck down everybody who tried to mount behind them. Each Tibetan thought of himself, and only of himself. And among them were the Tibetans whom my lamas had organized into a guard. With the flight of those beyond the gates, there were no soldiers for Godrang. We had no feeling that soldiers were a protection, but even so, so strong is earthly habit, we felt better when we believed that armed might stood by us.

"If we ask for help, Howard Davies," said Emdap Muh, finally, "do we bring people of your world to their destruction?"

"Whether we do not," I said, "and I believe that it is Tibet that is being punished, not the outside world, whatever action it takes, we must call for help!"

We whirled to go back into the dungeon. I couldn't see a lama anywhere. Godrang seemed to be utterly deserted. The lamas, their faith in their gods gone, had hidden away in whatever holes they could find. It was a dreadful experience for Emdap Muh and me.

Down in the dungeon, the Living Buddha paused, and I knew he was

running over in his mind the names of possessors of the "magic" *Kadakh*. This done, he swung the Mirror, and by the direction I knew he was probing through the nearest place where help might be found that could reach us quickly.

China!

Chungking. Chinese soldiery, who could be sent to us by airplane. Emdap Muh, using the *Kadakh*, brought a startled Chinese into the crypt with us—together with his wife and children and his tea-table. The Chinese, it seemed, had a habit of hanging his *Kadakh* over the back of his chair as he ate. I didn't bother to find out why. A touch of vanity perhaps; a touch of elegance. In any case, there was the whole outfit—excepting only the chair and the *Kadakh*!

Emdap Muh snapped commands, pleas, at the Chinese. He explained what he had to. Almost instantly the fatalism of the East expressed itself in the ready acceptance of the whole thing by the Chinese, as just one of those things that were likely to happen to a man and his family in a harsh world.

Yes, he said, he would personally contact the Generalissimo....

"But what if he does not believe?" said the Chinese.

"Go to him with the *Kadakh* in your hands," said Emdap Muh. "He will take it. I'll bring him here, which, I think, will convince him—if you are not able to do so!"

The Chinese paled.

"He might cut off my head, if anything went wrong."

"Then you convince him of the truth of your experience. After all, you have your wife and children to prove what has happened...."

The man nodded. The *Kadakh* was operated by Emdap Muh. The Chinese and his family were gone.

"Now," said Emdap Muh, "if he doesn't tell the whole story to all Chungking, before he gets around to his Generalissimo...."

"The Mirror!" I said briefly.

He swung it into position. A slight smile touched his lips.

"He's hurrying to the Generalissimo," said Emdap Muh, "and he's so busy planning how he shall tell his story, and his lips are working so hard to keep up with his brains, as he travels through Chungking to military headquarters, he doesn't even hear the excited shouts of friends! He'll convince his military master!"

Now, while I made photographs—nothing whatever could keep me from getting all of them I could—Emdap Muh switched back to Deema Moray, and found her with Colonel Cranshaw on a landing field beyond Darjeeling, directing the provisioning and manning of a dozen great bombing planes.

There was something heartening about those twelve great planes—about the soldiers who were crowding into them, armed to the teeth, and with parachutes strapped to their backs. British 'chutists were going to have their chance.

We watched and listened until Deema Moray went with the Colonel to a wireless station—after the dozen planes began to take off for the flight to the Roof of the World.

Deema Moray—and for the life of me I could not see how anything she was doing could possibly be construed as helpful to the Martians—began contacting military groups everywhere, explaining to them the danger, pulling no punches.

Three planes started from Indo-China, manned by French.

From the nearest Japanese base a dozen more planes took off, heading for Tibet. Deema even arranged for

a truce between the Chinese and the Japanese who should cross the Border into Tibet—during the time they were inside Tibet.

For that period they would not be enemies, but allies. When, and if, they went back, they could be enemies again.

And, advised by Colonel Cranshaw, she was telling each contingent just where, in Tibet, to head for—so that no lamasery should be unprotected, no lamasery should have it all.

Special combinations of nationalities, were to be sent to Lhasa, to guard the Potala—and the Dalai Lama.

Against what—that we could do anything about—nobody knew, really. But a brave show might give us the answer—and it might also result in the annihilation of those who were flying to the aid of Tibet and Tibetans.

Deema Moray reached across the roof of the world to start Russians in Siberia, flying to Tibet. And that meant, without doubt, German aid—for the world knew that Germans had a hand in the training of Russian aviators.

Deema Moray was, and swiftly, arousing the world.

How, in Heaven's name, could her efforts possibly work to the advantage of Martians?

Emdap Muh and I went over the ground until we were crazy, and could find no answer. But the harder we tried to understand, the more certain I was I could hear the chuckling which came from the lips of the Gelong Tze Gatze, when he had no longer been the Gelong, but the Great Selfless One who had taken his place.

I could hear the words of Deema's rescuer, those mocking words.

And when the Living Buddha and I heard the first droning of motors,

I could still hear that eerie, triumphant chuckling. Not all the photographs I could take, and I took them madly, concentrating on the Mirror and the pictures it showed to Emdap Muh and me, could keep me from hearing those Martian chuckles, those Martian words of triumph.

The most difficult thing to bear was this: the fact that nothing else whatever was happening in and around Godrang.

For what were the Martians waiting?

## CHAPTER X

### HELP COMES DRONING DOWN

**T**HE MARTIANS, I knew before the first help came droning down, had done exactly the same thing to every important Tibetan lamasery—which meant all of them, including the Potala—they had done to Godrang. They had burned a moat around each, and frightened every common Tibetan into fleeing into the Tibetan wastes—thus separating a whole nation from the source of its life, its religion—its ancient system of philosophy.

That more was to come we felt very sure. That death would strike among our allies as they came, I was perfectly sure.

When we heard the first planes droning toward us, the Living Buddha said to me:

"You will please be my contact with the foreigners. I appreciate everything they will do, and they shall be amply rewarded, but I do not wish to make too close personal contact."

I understood this perfectly. Personal contact with people who believed him to be a reincarnation of a god on earth, and personal contact with un-

believers who would think him just a man, and perhaps a fake, was too much to ask of him. He wasn't motivated by snobbishness, but a very natural fear. And there was no real need of his making contact with the foreigners. As I would have to make arrangements with them anyway, as his interpreter, it didn't matter if I did it on my own.

There was nothing to deter him, however, from standing on the verandah whence we had seen the burning-in of the moat, to watch the foreigners come. He had seen but one airplane in his life, that of Demma Moray; and that for such a brief time it could have meant next to nothing for him. He'd never had the chance to see it close to.

A half dozen huge bombers came into view, to the northeast, just over the shoulder of the Mountain Godrang. Emdap Muh watched them increase in size and there was a strange light in his eyes. He was still nineteen, remember, and those planes must have hit him right between the eyes. They were beautiful, and they flew a tight formation.

Those flyers had been trained to their jobs in a long-drawn-out war. They would be good. Just to see them come made my courage rise, added to my confidence—if I didn't try to remember too much. It was better for the moment to let wishful thinking make me feel better.

"They are miracles," said the Living Buddha.

"Man-made," I replied.

"Nothing is really man-made," replied Emdap Muh, and I didn't contradict him. "Look at those beautiful birds, capable of bearing me in their bodies, and tell me that they are truly the work of men?"

I didn't tell him anything. He could believe what he liked to believe.

What was troubling me was this, as those planes came nearer: when would the Martians strike? The planes had to land outside the moat, where the ground was reasonably level. The soldiers would have to cross the moat, and I remembered so vividly what had happened to those twenty Tibetan horsemen. Would the same thing happen to the soldiers who were coming to help us? Were we justified in asking them to risk so much, even though they were soldiers, and here as a matter of duty, obeying the commands of their leaders? They must, every last one of them, know what danger they faced. For by this time the wireless of the world was crackling out the strange story which came from Tibet.

The six planes, above Godrang, broke formation. Following one another, directly above the Lamasery, in a great circle of tremendous, powerful sound, they made no attempt to come down to a landing. Their leader, I knew, was studying the lay of the land, while those whom he commanded, the rest of his flight, were waiting to see what he would do, what commands he would issue. That the planes could talk to one another by telephone I believed to be true.

Up there was organization, as tight as even the philosophical organization of Tibet.

Well, why didn't they come down and land?

I soon had my answer to this. Emdap Muh grasped my shoulder.

"Davies, my friend, they are throwing a man out, to see what happens to him before they risk landing!"

**I** HAD FORGOTTEN to mention parachutes to Emdap Muh, and just by chance he had failed to see one in operation through the *Mirror*.





could do was watch the flowers of the 'chutes open. Every 'chute worked, too, and a hundred men were floating down to Godrang. Watching them, I understood what a formidable force parachute troops could me.

I was about to leave the verandah, show myself to the officer in command of the soldiers—not a lama was in sight anywhere, and they would have fled from those 'chutes if there had been no Martian scare at all, never having seen anything like them—when the Fire Crystals struck again, and very strangely.

Two of the falling men, after their 'chutes opened, went up in flames. There wasn't even smoke to mark their passing. They were simply floating down, swaying back and forth, pulling their shrouds to spill the wind and hit the spot in Godrang they wished to hit—when the flame out of nowhere struck them, and they vanished, with as utter finality as the twenty horsemen had vanished.

Just like that, gone in a breath.

And I knew that the other soldiers had seen, at least some of them, for terror struck them—and some of them pulled their shrouds so completely, in order not to delay their contact with the earth, that, it later developed, two men had broken legs, and one a broken back upon landing.

Two men, out of a hundred, had been destroyed by the Fire Crystals. Why? Just to show us that the Martians were still around, and a threat we could not forget? To let us know that if they wished, the Martians could destroy every 'chutist before he landed? Why those two victims, and no others?

I had no answer at the moment. Emdap Muh went back into his quarters, and I dashed down the cobblestone walk to make contact with the soldiers.

A major was commanding his parachute troops to "fall in."

They had left their 'chutes for the time being, and were doing just that. I advanced on the Major. He turned toward me, did not seem surprised—not nearly as surprised as I was, anyway. The Major was an American, though his troops were Chinese. The Major—Gambel, his name proved to be—was an American soldier of fortune. He'd been through all kinds of wars, under many flags, and this was just another job to him. I can't tell what a relief it was to see him. His whole demeanor spelled efficiency.

"Davies?" he said.

"Yes." Naturally he knew of me from the tales that had been told.

"This is a rum go, isn't it? Why didn't the flame from the sky, or whatever it was, take the lot of us?"

"I've been wondering," I said. "Maybe the fire-throwers just wanted to warn you that in their own good time they'd do the same thing to everybody. I must confess I really hoped that the Fire Crystals would not be used against foreigners."

Major Gambel laughed harshly.

"THAT'S the funniest part of the whole thing, Davies. Those two chaps—I've just checked up to make sure—who didn't make it to the ground, were a couple of Tibetans we picked up in Chungking to use as guides to Godrang. Strange that both of them should have been destroyed."

It didn't seem strange to me at all, though it made a cold chill run along my spine. It was quite in keeping with things that had happened here in Godrang since the Martians had started making their moves. I could not now remember when that had been, for I hadn't slept, and if I had eaten or drunk anything I couldn't

remember it—nor was I yet either hungry or thirsty.

While his men stood at ease I brought Gambel up to date, and if the story made him afraid, I saw no signs of it.

"Well," he said when I had finished, "that means martial law, though just what good we can do I don't know. The roofs of these shacks look like good places to spot our machine guns, and the walls ought to be hard to breach. . . ."

The talk was silly, and we both knew it. The planes had gone away, back to Chunking, it was all up to Gambel, and he was simply talking whatever came into his head, while he laid his plans. The users of the Fire Crystals didn't need to breach any walls. If they did, all they had to do was touch them anywhere with their terrific power, and there would be no more walls.

Gambel knew it, too.

"Where is everybody?" he asked, finally.

"The Living Buddha is in his quarters," I explained. "I wish you wouldn't try to get to him. I'll be your contact with the poor fellow. As for the other lamas, they've probably burrowed under the cobblestones. Everybody here, and all through Tibet for that matter, is scared stiff—including me!"

"Have you any suggestions?"

"Only this: take charge of Godrang, throw a guard around the Palace, and line up the lamas in the biggest open space. That will be where the visitors' building was burned."

"Why hold an inspection of lamas, Davies?" asked Gambel.

"I'm looking for Martians," I said. "Somebody burned that moat, yesterday, probably from the top of that mountain behind the Palace. Someone just now burned your two Tibetan

guides—though not until they had led you here, which is an exceedingly strange thing."

"Think you can spot Martians?"

"I can only try. Much time has passed. Maybe by now I can't tell the difference between Tibetans and Martians. But let's have a try at it later, anyway."

Gambel turned and snapped commands at his Chinese soldiers. They grinned and broke ranks. They gathered their 'chutes together in one place, piled all their equipment with it, except knives—and then started rooting lamas out of buildings, ordering them to the open place, where I could look them over.

The lamas were outraged. They protested, some of them squealing like pigs. But the Chinese did not seem to mind. They let several lamas feel the kiss of their blades. Gambel did not try to stop them. One Chinese knocked a lama kicking with a blow of his fist.

Then I did protest to Gambel. His answer was in a cold voice that made me wonder, for a few minutes, if Gambel himself might not be one of the Great Selfless Ones. However, he was too completely American for that, as he said,

"Martial law is martial law. When the commander speaks, others must jump. That applies, incidentally, to your Living Buddha and to yourself. Don't make any mistakes about it. If I am to do any good here I've got to be boss. I'm going to be."

**T**HE HORRIFIED lamas were pressed into service, menial service, which few of them had ever experienced. They were forced to pick out the best buildings, in which the Chinese soldiers were quartered—and then made to serve the soldiers.

"Isn't it going pretty far, to put

them to such work?" I asked of Gambel.

"I'm running this show," said Gambel. "If you interfere I'll use you as my dog-robber, see? What good are lamas as matters now stand? They simply hide their heads and hope for the best. Now they're serving a useful purpose."

There was plenty of truth in what he said, a fact which I immediately recognized. I offered no further protest, though I felt sorry for the lamas. And when, a bit later, I told the Living Buddha about it, his reaction rather startled me. He threw back his head and laughed. He was delighted that his lamas had been put to useful work.

After that I didn't feel sorry for them.

But what came next? While Gambel posted his guards, and "occupied" Godrang, Emdap Muh and I, through the Mirror, watched the same thing happening all over Tibet. But we saw not one other 'chutist burned in his harness as he came drifting down. We both understood that that was because none of them were Tibetan. But why should the Tibetans have been picked? And how did the workers of the Fire Crystals know just who was who?

"Davies," said Emdap Muh, "it was done from the crypt, from beside the Mirror. They had to use the Mirror to see, to pick out which were Tibetans. And then they operated their Fire Crystals from the crypt."

It was a logical explanation, for neither of us had been in the crypt while the planes were overhead, and while the 'chutists were falling.

At least it was the only explanation we had at the moment.

I took some more pictures, giving Gambel time to make his dispositions, when I went back to him, and

gave the Tibetans the once-over again. But it was no use. If there were a Martian among them I could not pick him out.

I realized, by that time, that Gambel had been allowed to make his dispositions for defense, without the slightest interference. Why? Why did the Martians allow men to occupy Godrang, right where the Mirror was, when they could so easily burn them down? Why let them mount machine guns, post sentries, even throw bridges across the moat, in order to get water from the bawling stream beyond the Moat? I had no answer to that, and the more I thought of the strangeness of it, the more I didn't like it.

Gambel, however, wasn't worried in the slightest. He told his troops, while I listened, that any man who so much as touched a valuable thing in Godrang, would be shot through the head by Gambel himself — after which he organized a patrol, under a Chinese lieutenant, and sent them out into the wastes.

"Time to tell the general public it's safe to come out of its holes," he explained.

And then we both stiffened, a little startled. For from the palace had come a sound that is seldom heard—the sound of the summons-horn which is the horn only the Living Buddha may use. It froze the Tibetans who heard, into statuesque terror. It startled the Chinese. It made Gambel look at me questioningly.

It gave me the creeps. I knew it was for me, and that something must have fearfully agitated the Living Buddha, that he should blow the horn which never came down from its hook, even at the height of catastrophe—or when a decree from the Dalai Lama was to be broadcast. It

would, of course, have been blown if the Lamasery were being visited by either the Dalai Lama or the Panchen Lama, his next in line.

So it had to be something approaching an emergency.

**T**HE LAMAS who heard dropped to their knees and banged their heads on the cobblestones. They told their beads with great speed and terror. But I could make nothing whatever of their words.

I whirled and raced to the palace of the Living Buddha.

The Chinese sentries, already posted, let me through, knowing I came from Gambel, was his contact with Emdap Muh—about whom they must of course be terrifically curious, especially those who were Buddhists.

I entered the quarters of Emdap Muh, and saw by his face that the situation had taken a grave turn. For the life of me I could not imagine what it could be.

He beckoned me to follow him to the door of his inner chamber, just above the stairs which led to the crypt where the Martian Mirror was kept.

I went in with him, and saw a Living Buddha make genuflections—when I had not believed they did it to anyone on earth.

There, sitting on Emdap's own dais, was a boy of nine, a boy with a sweet face, unbelievably intelligent eyes. Naturally, I knew him at once, and I could not help making a bow, and a knee-bending, like an old-fashioned curtsy, to let him know I knew him.

The Dalai Lama had been brought, via the *Kadakh*, from the Potala, to the seat of the Dalai Lamas of old—Godrang!

"Only his closest advisers know he is no longer in the Potala," said Em-

dap Muh. "There is a bigger guard around the Potala than anywhere else in Tibet. But no foreigner except yourself knows that the Dalai Lama is not in Lhasa, but in Godrang!"

How can one explain what a terrific move this was for the Dalai Lama to make? If his people knew that, in the face of the general danger, he had been spirited out of the holy of holies of the Dalai Lamas, to Godrang, they would have. . . .

I couldn't even guess what they would have thought, felt, done.

I just knew that an abysmal change had taken place, to bring this near-miracle about. And his advisers must have been terrified, else they would never have permitted the most precious personage in the world to make use of the Tibetan disintegrator-reintegrator, even to escape from physical danger.

The boy smiled at me. His hand made the motions, automatically, which blessed me.

Then his face became grave, remote. It was up to others to look after his person. He had withdrawn into some inner place of the spirit—where nine-year-old boys who are very precious are sometimes wont to withdraw.

And Emdap Muh promptly began to have hysterics.

"Why doesn't something happen?" he screamed. "Every Lamasery has been turned into a fortress, yet nothing has happened—except the death of two more of my people. If the Martians are going to strike down our new protectors, why don't they do it? If they're not, why don't they make some sign? Why must they make us suffer so, give us no chance to guess what comes next?"

"We'll probably know soon enough," I said.

"Must they wait until I go mad,

and all the other Living Buddhas with me, and all the lamas in Tibet? I tell you, Davies, if something doesn't happen, besides this tension in the air—which seems to be growing—I shall seriously contemplate suicide!"

He regained some control of himself at this dreadful—for a Tibetan, anyway—blasphemy. He looked at the Dalai Lama. Then he knelt at his feet, asked for his blessing and his forgiveness.

I suppose he got some peace from that.

I am sure that his hysteria, however, was thereby transferred to me!

Why didn't the enemy make some sort of move?

As though in answer to this, I heard a soft voice speaking my name, from the door which gave on the stairs leading down to the crypt. I turned. The Dalai Lama turned. The Living Buddha turned.

Deema Moray had returned, by way of the *Kadakh* in the crypt. I wanted to take her in my arms, even in front of those two celibates. But I found I could not.

How was Deema Moray helping the Martians?

The fact that she had come back this way, even though she had done her job, made the question loom with even greater importance.

Was Deema Moray a Martian?

## CHAPTER XI

### WHEN COMES THE EXPLOSION

**W**AS SHE a Martian part of the time?

I compromised. I moved with her back into the space behind the door, above the stairs, and took her in my arms. I told her how happy I was for her to be back.

I kissed her, and she returned the kiss. Then I told her what my fear was, and her face became ghastly in the eerie light from Emdap Muh's flambeaus—which he seemed somehow, always, to keep lighted on the stairs and in the crypt of old records.

"Howard," her voice was almost a wail, "that's one of the reasons I came back! I don't know what I do during the blank spaces!"

"Blank spaces?" I asked, my heart sinking into my boots.

"Yes, several times a day I lose time out of my life, for which I cannot account, and it terrifies me beyond words, because I cannot remember a thing that happens during those spaces. What do I do? Where do I go? With whom do I talk? I've no idea. The time lost varies from fifteen minutes to as much as an hour!"

What could I say to her? Did she, during those periods, become a vessel for the Essence of a Martian, then return to her body when he had made some hideous use of her? Some use which would eventually spell the complete spoilation of Tibet? How could we ever know?

How could I frighten her more?

"I want to be with you, closely," she said, "so that you shall be able to do something when I change in some way, even to . . . even to . . ."

I knew what she was going to say, but I could not prevent her saying it.

"Even to destroying me!"

"I could never do it," I told her, "even though by doing so I should save Tibet, or the world."

But even as I said that, I knew it was not true. When mankind measured duty to his world against the love for a woman, love always had to take a secondary place, no matter how great it might be. It would be so now, and we both knew it. I only

hoped the decision would never have to be made. One decision she had already made, however, pleased me. Out of all the world, she had chosen me as the right one to come to in her extremity. She had come to me because she . . . because she . . .

Loved me? She did not say so. That I loved her I now knew, of course. And my heart was heavy with responsibility for her, and for Tibet. And if Tibet were lost, the world.

That tension created by Emdap Muh continued to increase in me, and I realized, in Deema Moray. It was building up to a high pitch, up to the place where the air was alive with it, as it had been just before the moat had been burned into the ground around Godrang. Something was going to happen, at last.

That it would be surprising, and dreadful, I had every reason to believe, as did the world. Did we have the slightest chance of standing against the Martians? I knew, and knew that Emdap Muh knew, that the Martians could take back their Mirror any time they wished—and that they would do so when they had sufficiently “punished” Tibet for the theft of it.

I called to Emdap Muh that I was going down to the Mirror, that Deema was going with me. Emdap Muh asked the Dalai Lama for permission to come with me, and the childish voice of the spiritual leader of all Tibet said,

“You may go, provided I go with you!”

So the four of us, Deema and I leading, Emdap Muh bringing up the rear, so that he should have all the protection we could give him at the moment, moved down into the crypt. The Living Buddha was fixing the flambeaus as he descended, with such ease and surety that I knew

long habit had made it as simple for him as telling his beads.

I swung onto the Mirror, simply to examine some of the face of Tibet. And at once I got a terrific shock.

I saw a lamasery I had seen before, one which Emdap Muh had told me was distant from Godrang about a hundred and fifty miles. And this was what seemed to be happening. All around it, as far as the eye could reach, grey mist was closing in on the lamasery. It looked like a high fog, but by the very fact that it closed in from all four cardinal points of the compass — *and therefore seemed independent of wind from any direction!*—told me that here were the Martians in action. Either this was a new weapon, or a new use for the Fire Crystals, the only weapons the Martians had indicated they possessed.

*Those Fire Crystals were all, for they couldn't have brought anything through the Heavyside Layer themselves, and exploring Tibetans had brought only the Fire Crystals. Therefore the white mist had to be steam, produced by the Fire Crystals, and controlled by them as they seemed to be able to control the fires they set.*

How did I know this, aside from the fact that the mist closed in from all sides, and so was not dependent on any wind, and must indeed in some cases be drifting against the wind?

There was no failing to get the answer to this—for within the ever-narrowing square of mist, Tibetans belonging to that lamasery, were fleeing before the mist! And there was excellent reason why they should, I knew, when I saw some of those who could not travel fast enough to keep ahead of it, caught in its whiteness —*and consumed as those twenty*



*horsemen had been consumed by the flame in the moat!*

**T**HEY were racing for the protection of their lamasery, whence they had fled so recently because of Martian activity, i. e., the burning of those moats, because they were more afraid of the creeping mist than they were afraid of the fire. Besides, the lamasery offered the only protection they had had all their lives — and which had been the protection of their forbears for many generations.

With a groan of despair which I could not help emitting, I began to move the Mirror about. I picked out first one lamasery, then the other — and exactly the same thing was happening to all of them. A square of mist was creeping toward each lamasery, and within its closing walls the humble people of Tibet, on horseback, on yaks and on foot, were racing for such sanctuary as they could find.

How, now, about the soldiers on guard at those lamaseries. What would they do?

While trying to guess, and afraid that I already knew the answer, I swung the Mirror to give myself a glimpse of the Potala at Lhasa. And the same creeping mist was closing in on the palace of the Dalai Lama! The advisers of His Holiness had sent him away from his capital — sent him to Godrang, the ancient seat of the Dalai Lamas.

With that thought I swung the Mirror so that I would get pictures of Godrang and surrounding territory. . . .

*Only to find what I must have known all the time I would find — that the creeping mist was closing in on Godrang as well, herding before it the frightened ones who had so recently fled.*

By their mastery of their weapon, the Martians were going to use Tibetans themselves, as an army to drive out the allies Deema and I had been instrumental in bringing into Tibet. They would die if they allowed the mist to flow over them. The soldiers could not allow them to capture the lamaseries. Not while they, the humble Tibetans, were being used as soldiers of the Martians!

Here was strategy of a kind requiring the brain of a general. I knew of no such person, close enough to ask for advice.

And my ears were still ringing, after I had shuttered the Mirror, with the terrified cries of Tibetans who were charging on their lamaseries, carrying everything before them, trampling their own underfoot, so filled with terror they did not know what they did — and so were as deadly as so many robots would have been, except for the fact that bullets would kill them.

I swung back, for just a moment, to the lamasery I had noticed, where my fears were realized.

British soldiers, guarding that lamasery, its lamas and its Living Buddhas, were firing on the trapped Tibetans with machine-guns and rifles. They were mowing down the humble ones, but the others were coming on. And they were doing the thing they should not have done, doing it desperately — they were answering the fire with their own weapons.

Allies brought to Tibet, were being turned against Tibetans by a masterly bit of tactics — and I was not a military mind to find an answer to the problem.

But I dashed back out of the crypt, Deema with me, and Emdap Muh right behind her, all of us forgetting

the young Dalai Lama—which didn't matter, it developed, because he was right behind us, running with the best of us—as I headed for a conference with Major Gambel.

But even as I hurried along the cobblestones, machine-guns were chattering from every house-top. Gambel had done the only thing he could do. If the Tibetans were doomed to die at the hands of the Martians, and they tried to escape by running into the lamaseries, were the soldiers were, the Martians, in order to destroy them, might destroy the foreign soldiers as well.

The chattering of machine-guns was answered by the yells of the Tibetans who were closing in—by yells and by rifle shots. A Chinese was struck down, right beside Gambel, as I jumped to a stairway to gain his ear, Deema right beside me.

"Gambel," I shrieked, "you can't fire on those Tibetans. They are the people you are here to protect."

"And when it comes to a choice between protecting them and ourselves, my first duty is to my men, and to the lamasery itself!" he shouted back. "Don't interfere, or I'll have you serving a gun. Who's that kid?"

I didn't tell him. No telling what he might do.

**H**E MIGHT have realized, by the behavior of the lamas but he thought their bowing and scraping indicated a fear of the guns and their own charging countrymen, who were being mowed down with a ruthlessness beyond anything I had ever experienced.

Men were caught in the mist, and destroyed.

It was useless to retreat into the mist.

In a matter of seconds. . . .

I whirled on Emdap Muh, yelled at him: "This officer will destroy your people if something isn't instantly done. That applies to people who, everywhere, are converging on lamaseries. Tell me, from what point did you send your rockets to Mars? Quickly! There is no reason or excuse now for secrecy!"

"But why do you ask? Rockets cannot serve. . . ."

"I'm asking because I believe you selected the highest point in Tibet. And that point, I feel sure, is now being used as a base of operations by the Martians. Wouldn't they, lacking a Mirror, even the obsolete one we were told about, select the point in Tibet from which they could see the greatest distance—through the eyes of Tibetan bodies?"

Emdap Muh did not know what I was driving at, but it didn't take the four of us long to get back down into the crypt.

"The highest point in Tibet," he said, as he focussed, the Mirror, "is also the highest spot in the world—higher than Everest. It is called Amnyi Machin!"

The Mirror came to rest under his sensitive hands.

The Living Buddha groaned with despair. I stepped close to him, to see. I saw the crest of the mountain no outlaw had ever scaled. I saw the crest of Amnyi Machin. I saw several score of people who seemed to be Tibetans. But when I looked closely at their faces, I knew that every last one of them was a Martian. Not only by the looks of their faces, the odd difference in shape from the Tibetan "type," but the greenish cast of countenance.

Emdap Muh had located, with my help, the base of operation of the

Martians. And a quick search among them showed us the face of—the Martian who had rescued Deema Moray from the burning plane! He seemed to be in command.

At his command a phalanx of Martians held their Fire Crystals—and covered the face of Tibet with the creeping mist which was slowly but surely destroying the people of Tibet, at the hands of those whom we had asked to come over into Tibet and save us.

What was the answer now? I remembered how that Martian had left us—the very one we were watching now. At that time I had been sure that he had come by using the *Kadakh*. Afterward I remembered he had *gone*, that way, but had *come* by means, apparently, of manipulating a dimension unknown to science.

"Emdap Muh," I cried out, "the *Kadakh*! Look that Martian over carefully. See if there is a *Kadakh* about him. We must do something, and instantly, to stay the slaughter of Tibetans!"

One didn't have to say something twice to the Living Buddha. He maneuvered the Mirror—forever, it seemed to me, when every second spelled doom for more Tibetans.

"There is a *Kadakh*," he said, "but it is not held by that Martian. It is folded up, in the clothing of another one."

"Bring him here! It's our only chance. We've got to fight for time, arrange for a truce, do *something*! Hurry! He will have to serve as a herald!"

**E**MDAP MUH, his hands shaking, fumbled with the *Kadakh* which would always have a sentimental attachment for me, because by means of it Deema Moray had come back to me.

And instantly a Martian stood facing him.

"A truce!" gasped Emdap Muh. "I offer anything, if only my people be spared."

"You own life?" said the Martian grimly, not in the least surprised. "You will, if the leader-on-earth of the Great Selfless Ones decrees, go with us to Mars, to be held as a hostage while you live?"

"Yes. Yes. Anything. Only hurry. My people are dying. What is the name of your leader?"

"Great Selfless Ones do not have names. They are simply—the guardians of the Mirror!" and he glanced at the Mirror, with reverence in his face.

"I'm sending you back. Hold up the creeping mist," said Emdap Muh. "Let us talk it over!"

The Martian was gone. The very next instant there stood before us—while the eyes of the Dalai Lama popped out, and Deema Moray almost wept with nervousness—the Outsider who had saved Deema Moray from the fire which had destroyed her plane and its other passengers.

The Martian bowed to Deema.

"We have much to thank you for!" he said.

Horror filled me as he said this. But imagine my greater horror when he spoke also to me,

"And you, Howard Davies!"

Since both of us, from start to finish, had done what seemed to be the proper thing to do, what did the Martian mean? He did not give us a chance to ask. He said,

"I have halted the mist of Amnyi Machin, temporarily. What do you wish of us? Quickly for I am in no mood to parry words!"

The only relief for our almost unbearable tension was this: for as

long as we held this man with us, Tibetans were not being slain. I looked into the Mirror, to make sure.

There was no mist anywhere in Tibet at the moment. The Fire Crystals might have drunk it to invisibility, instantly. Just as quickly, though, it could rise from the ground again, and continue its slow, inexorable march.

It depended on this Martian who, as one of the Great Selfless Ones, had not even a name to identify with the tremendous power he wielded. The Martian waited with none too great patience. He looked curiously at the Dalai Lama, and, of course, we all knew he knew who and what the Dalai Lama was.

Emdap Muh looked at me imploringly, said,

"Please see what you can decide upon between you, Howard Davies—you and the Great Selfless One-in-Command!"

Thus was it all dumped on my shoulders, where, perhaps, it belonged.

Deema Moray, sensing my shrinking from such responsibility, came to stand beside me, a hand on my shoulder.

"Howard," she said softly, "it seems to be up to you. I can only say that I am with you!"

On my ability to drive a bargain—and I had no idea whether I possessed even a hint of such ability—rested the fate of Tibet.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE ULTIMATUM

**T**HERE are a certain number of things I insist on," said the Martian, "which may seem to have no reason to them. But

they all fit into our plans, as you will discover. First, I have said that I owed something to you, Miss Moray, and to you, Howard Davies. What is it that you would most like to do at this moment?"

The Martian had a strange smile on his greenish face. There was a gleam in his eyes that danced. Puzzled, I looked at Deema. She was frowning as she looked at me. Both of us, then, turned and looked at Emdap Muh. He was watching the Martian with all his attention. The Dalai Lama merely looked, at nothing as though therein he would see the answer to all the problems of Tibet.

The words came out before I could really frame them, or realize their implications.

"I love Deema Moray," I said. "I would like her to be my wife."

Startled at myself, I stared at Deema. A slight smile touched her lips—and I knew that she had not taken offense, though she blushed, and I felt my own cheeks go hot.

Her voice was very low as she said, "That is also my wish; to be the wife of Howard Davies!"

"Then as a first step to peace, and as part payment for what you have both done for the Great Selfless Ones, I wish to be the instrument by which you realize this desire. If the Living Buddha will officiate?"

It was not a wish, really, but a command. And no one could question the authority of the Living Buddha to perform a marriage ceremony—even in a land where contracting parties merely agreed between themselves that they were husband and wife.

The Living Buddha, however, knew the ritual of the Western World, and he signaled us—while his face still was puzzled—to stand

before him, for me to take the hand of Deema Moray. But before Emdap Muh could begin the ceremony, Deema said,

"I cannot enter into this, even though it appears to have something to do with peace between two vast worlds, until a certain doubt of mine has been set at rest. *What did I do during those blank spaces, when I lost time out of my life?*"

The Martian smiled, and his answer was strange indeed.

"*Those were the only times,*" he said, "*when you were not working directly for the Great Selfless Ones!* You did absolutely nothing, because you were not there to do anything. And I am pleased to tell you no more, because it is well that you shall always wonder. It is good for a woman to have a little doubt of herself! Especially a woman like Deema Moray, whose success has been such that she is independent beyond the right of any woman to be independent. It is not good for any human being, in any world, to be too sure of himself or herself!"

"But I did nothing during those periods of which I should be ashamed!" persisted Deema Moray.

"As Earthmen regard shame, no!"

"But I was displaced by . . ."

His face hardened a little as he interrupted. "I have told you enough. I insist that there be a very little that you do not know, so that you shall do your best to be sure of yourself, in your life with your husband. *For because of his work for us, he deserves the best that the Great Selfless Ones can bestow upon him!*"

"But since all the efforts of both of us have been for the benefit of Tibet, how can you say that we have aided you?"

"In the end," he said, "you shall

know. Now, shall we proceed with the ceremony? Time is being wasted."

**W**E WERE married, Deema Moray and I, there in the crypt of ancient records. The ceremony was witnessed by the Dalai Lama, and the Martian gave away the bride, in surely the most amazing ceremony this world has ever heard of. Deema and I kissed each other, though the situation was so tense I doubt if either of us realized just what had happened and what it meant to us.

There were too many questions remaining unanswered.

The Martian shook hands with both of us — an action that would have been strange indeed, if we had not known of the Mirror, and that Martians had been watching the minutest actions of Earthmen for untold centuries. This Martian probably knew English better than I did, though he had confined himself to Tibetan—doubtless in deference to Emdap Muh and the Dalai Lama.

"The first step, with our thanks besides—part payment only, Mr. and Mrs. Davies!—has been taken. Now, several rockets are to be shot to Mars at once, containing, as they did before, those marvelous *Kadakhs* of the Tibetans, which, unlike our Fire Crystals, can transport material things through the Heavieside Layer."

I heard a groan of anguish from Emdap Muh. My own heart sank. Deema almost cried out. There was no mistaking his meaning. He was taking the first step to deprive the Earth of the glory of possessing the Mirror of Mars.

"You realize, of course," I said, sparring for time, "that with *Kadakhs* on Mars, Tibetans can visit your planet any time they wish?"

"They shall be welcome," said the

Martian, "since we can return the compliment, and by using the *Kadakh*s can take back with us whatever we wish. I had first thought of insisting that every *Kadakh* in Tibet be destroyed, but that would be foolish, when others could be constructed. How about those rockets?"

"It shall be done," I said, wondering if there were going to be any end to what this Martian wanted of us. I turned and looked at Emdap Muh. He acted and moved like a man of ninety instead of nineteen, as he stepped to the *Kadakh*, made some adjustments, and a Tibetan lama of the Yellow Hats stood before us.

"You will go to Amnyi Machen," said the Living Buddha, "and dispatch four rockets to Mars. They shall contain three *Kadakh*s each."

The Tibetan was gone as soon as he nodded, toward the *Kadakh* on Amnyi Machen, in possession of the Martians.

Then the Martian sprang a surprise on all of us.

"Now, while we are awaiting the landing of the *Kadakh*s on Mars," he said, "I wish to see all those photographs you took of the Mirror. I saw some of them, you know, when I was here to dispose of those two Tibetan guides who tried to thwart the moat around Godrang, by dropping from airplanes. But I had not time to examine all of them. Please place them on the floor, in proper order!"

What in the world could this strange Outsider be driving at? Why should he be interested in those photographs? Was I to be deprived even of proof that any of this had happened, that there was such a thing, even, as a Martian Mirror? I asked him, but he merely insisted on seeing all of the photographs.

What sort of a creature was he, to speak of what was owed Deema and me by the Martians, then to pay for it, partially, with one hand, while taking away twice as much with the other?

However, I could do nothing but agree, and Deema urged me to hurry.

There was an immense number of the developed pictures. The Martian glanced at them swiftly, and made his own arrangement of them. What did he know about photographs, when he really had no need of photographs, since he was always in touch with the Mirror, wherein he could see more than any camera could ever show him—except this one itself, the Mirror! A camera of the Universe. A radio of the galaxies. A televisior of the spaces between the stars.

But he was deeply interested in the pictures, just the same.

And when he had run through them all, he turned on me and said:

"More must be taken at once. Come, Davies, I'll show you how to focus for what yet must be done."

But why, why, since he was going to take the Mirror away, and I was sure the greatest engineers in the nations could not make a Mirror from the pictures? Still, he was very intent, must certainly know what he was after.

I got my camera, and the Martian led me to the Mirror, which he touched with reverent fingers. That anything in the Universe, I knew, the thing was closer to him than that he would not hesitate to devastate a world to guard it, I could see in his greenish face.

He had, incidentally, made figures on the backs of my photographs, at top speed, with a pencil which he calmly took from my pocket. I did not get a look at the numbers, nor have the slightest idea what they

were for. Nor did he see fit to tell me. He was making a tremendous mystery of the whole thing.

He thought a moment, when he had checked the photographs with the Mirror. Then, and as swiftly as one of Hollywood's greatest directors would have done it, he showed me where, and at what angles, other pictures should be made. And feeling rebellion within me, but anxious to conclude the catastrophe of Tibet, I did as he told me, and exactly. When I had done he waited patiently for the developing.

In the midst of our work, the Tibetan we had sent to Amnyi Machen returned briefly to advise us that the rockets had been dispatched, bearing the twelve *Kadakhs*.

**S**TEP by step the Martian, whatever his purpose, was getting exactly what he asked for. In effect we were a beaten nation, suing for the best terms we could manage. And no particular purpose, save the return of the Mirror, could be read in any of it. They spoke of punishment, but what good did it do to punish common Tibetans for what their priesthood had done? There was vast, rank injustice in it somewhere. But I could not spot it.

To the Living Buddha and the Dalai Lama, the Tibetans who had been lost were spirits who would have to reincarnate as soon as possible, in order to work out their destinies as they had been "written" before they had been struck down by bullets. There were plenty of elements here I did not understand.

"Now," said the Martian, when he had examined the new pictures, "you are doubtless interested in what the rest of my terms are. But take your time, my friend—for you *are* my friend, you know!—and grasp each

bit of it as it transpires. This is most important for you, as well as for Tibet."

He pronounced the pictures all right.

Then he sprang another surprise.

"Isn't Martian Funston, the leader of your expedition into the Gobi Desert, regarded as one of the foremost scientists in the world?"

"Naturally you know the answer to that without asking it," I said. "Though the answer is yes, since you *have* asked. Why? Why should he be brought into this? He has nothing to do with it. He has never even been in Tibet, until now, working—doing whatever it is that he has been called upon to do by Wann Ta Chih—in the interests of science in the little known places of the earth. He has no fault in this."

"But he can be very useful to us," said the Martian. "He can help us to pay our liabilities, as we insist on doing in every case—just as we insisted on paying the Tibetans for destroying forty-seven of our Great Selfless Ones."

"But he has done nothing to you, for you or against you!" I insisted.

His greenish face went hard.

"He is part of the terms on which I insist. Bring him here, at once. And, oh yes, bring with him that Hsung Chun, your *compradore*. He will be a valuable assistant to Martin Funston!"

"Hsung Chun," I cried, "even led the firing on the Tibetans who pulled me into this dispute. He can't possibly be required to pay the Martians for anything."

"But isn't he loyal to you?"

"Why of course."

"And Funston would do anything for you, or he wouldn't be working with Wann Ta Chih now?"



"Yes. Yes, of course. But I can't see any reason . . ."

"At the moment it is enough that I see," said the Martian angrily. "Will you be so good as to bring Funston and Hsung here."

"Oh Great Selfless One," said Emdap Muh suddenly, "can't you have even a little mercy on Tibet, on her ancient traditions? Until you attacked us none but Living Buddhas and Dalai Lamas had ever entered this crypt. Now it is known to Martians, to lamas who would never have the honor, to foreigners—even to a woman, this Deema Moray. And now you are bringing two more foreigners, one of them Chinese, into our sacred place."

"With design, and with understanding!" retorted the Martian. "What sort of a war would fail to humiliate the loser? Isn't that in the best earthly tradition? Bring them, immediately!"

It was a bitter pill for the Living Buddha, and before he began the manipulations of the *Kadakh* which would bring it about, he asked that his Dalai Lama give permission, that he should bless Emdap Muh. The Dalai Lama, young as he was, must have realized that there was no choice—except of course to defy the Great Selfless Ones, and thus assure the total destruction of Tibet. So he blessed the Living Buddha, forgave him for the violation of tradition, and in a matter of seconds, Funston and Hsung Chin stood there in the crypt with us.

Hsung was frightened at first, half out of his wits, but nothing that could happen in the world could ever surprise Funston. He simply looked about him, nodded at Deema, shook hands with me, bowed to the Living Buddha, bent the right knee to the

Dalai Lama, and then looked steadily at the Martian.

"What is your chief interest in life, Funston?" asked the Martian.

"The progress and welfare of mankind," said Funston. "His past, his present, his future. Why?"

"Then you must be an excellent engineer, if you are good in this profession you have taken up."

"I am an ethnologist, a geologist, a paleontologist. . . ."

"All refer to activities of men, even geology and paleontology. Therefore I repeat, you must be an excellent engineer, since this also—or rather the works of engineers, from the first one of thousands of years ago, to the greatest of today—is part of the progress of mankind."

"I imagine I could do what needed to be done, if I had to," said Funston, pursing his red lips under his grey moustache.

"Then look at the Mirror," said the Martian.

"I've heard something about it," said Funston grimly. "I never expected to see it."

**T**HE Martian, to the amazement of all of us, seemed merely to be showing off this marvel of Mars to Martin Funston. Funston was stirred to his depths by what he saw in the Mirror—as the Martian ranged the world, gave Funston glimpses of Mars, of the stratas of Mercury, of the rings of Saturn, of whatever, and wherever, Funston asked as he shot questions with the speed of machine-gun bullets.

"Enough," said the Martian at last. "Just what, having seen the work of the Mirror, have you discovered about it? Could you duplicate the Mirror yourself? I understand that if you cannot do it, the likeli-

hood that anyone else on earth can, is very slight."

Now I thought I began to understand, and my heart went into my boots. Not only was the Martian going to take the Mirror back to Mars, but he was going to destroy, before the departure of the Great Selfless Ones, any scientist who might be able, either from my pictures, or the stories Deema Moray had published, or what I could remember of the Mirror, to make a duplicate of it!

It was not intended that Earth should have a copy of the Mirror!

This Martian was going to test the knowledge of Funston to the utmost, to make sure on this point.

"No, Funston, no!" I shouted. "Don't let him know the depth of your intellect. He is tricking you. He is afraid. . . ."

"It is you who are afraid, Davies," said the Martian. "Go ahead, Funston."

"I see no reason," said the old scientist grimly, "to hide the fact from anyone that I have a reasonably good brain. If I die for it, I can think of no better purpose. Go ahead with your questions, fellow, I'm interested enough to hear it all—whatever the consequences."

The Martian smiled at me.

"You know he can do it, don't you, Davies?" he said.

Every move I made, every outburst, seemed to be wrong. By crying out a warning to Funston, I had proved to the Martian the very thing I thought he wanted to find out—that he might destroy the scientist who could copy the Mirror.

The Martian launched into a swift explanation of the working of the Mirror. He spoke of certain elements needed in the construction of parts of machinery. He mentioned elements

I had never heard of, whereupon Funston would say:

"I know where it can be found. Upper Rhodesia!"

Now and again the Martian would mention something, some substance, of which even Funston was ignorant, of which he would say,

"If there is such an element in the earth at all, I don't know where to look for it."

"The Great Selfless Ones know," would be the answer of the Martian, "for they have had the Mirror for ages. You will find the element I have mentioned, in the Black Hills of Dakota! I can give you the exact location, and the depths in feet and inches!"

What in the name of all that was holy was the Martian getting at? Outside, through all Tibet, a nation was waiting. And beyond them a world was waiting. And here a Martian talked learnedly of physics and chemistry with Martin Funston. To what purpose? Why didn't the Martians do what they had to do, and get on with their business?

But no, there had to be more.

The Martian showed each of my pictures to Funston, one at a time, and showed him the numbers on their backs. Imagine! With a nation waiting to bury its dead, two men looked at my photographs! And talked about irrelevant things.

**T**HEN, as a last, unbelievable gesture, the Martian produced a scroll from somewhere inside his Tibetan garments—and unrolled it on the face of the Mirror, as though the Mirror had been a work-table, instead of the most miraculous invention in the Universe—at least as far as anyone on either Mars or Earth could realize now.

"Now," said the Martian, "using

this drawing of the Mirror, in conjunction with Davies' pictures—you see I have numbered them correspondingly, and my drawings are almost as accurate as his pictures—could you make a complete, workable copy of the Mirror?"

"Don't answer," I said again. "Don't answer. If you say you can he will destroy you!"

But Funston did not even seem to hear me. Shoulder touching shoulder, the Martian master of science and the scientist of Earth, pored over the drawing the Martian had made, and over my photographs. It seemed to Deema and me, and doubtless to the Dalai Lama and the Living Buddha, that they carried on forever, Funston asking questions, the Martian answering. I'd have thought they were very much pleased with each other. Finally, Funston said,

"I would devote my life to making a copy of that Mirror if given a chance!"

"And with the information we have here, you could do it?"

Funston hesitated for just a moment. After all, the Martian already knew his man, knew that Funston could do it. Funston said,

"I might even be able to improve somewhat on the original!"

All of us held our breaths, waiting for Funston to be wiped out—perhaps with fire. Instead, the Martian put the photographs and the drawing into the hands of Funston, and said,

"Good!"

We could make of that one word as little or as much as we wished. I chose to make the worst of it. The Martian turned on the Living Buddha,

"I am minded," he said, "to do you just one favor, to offset the punishment we have meted out to you. The Great Selfless Ones-on-Earth have

empowered me to offer you our fire for the cremation of your dead! It can be done instantly, as you know."

The Living Buddha stiffened as though he had been struck. Then, through set lips, he said:

"I would rather that all Tibet be destroyed, than that our dead be further desecrated—that their sacred bodies be touched a second time by your unearthly fire."

"Tradition!" said the Martian. "In its name the world is denied some of its greatest boons! But just remember, Rimpoche Emdap Muh, that I offered you at least one gesture of friendship, and that you spurned it with fury and disgust! I am not threatening that you will be sorry. I simply tell you so! Go, therefore, and see to the disposition of your own dead!"

"That," said the Living Buddha grimly, telling his beads, "has always been our intention. The outside world, or worlds, have no right to interfere with our secrets of death!"

To my complete mystification, the Martian laughed aloud! That the Great Selfless Ones had not struck the final, disastrous blow, I felt quite sure. I knew that the Dalai Lama, young as he was, and Emdap Muh, realized exactly the same thing.

Perhaps I had been mistaken in sending for the enemy at all.

Which reminded me again of the Martian's constant repetition of his debt to Deema and me! What debt? Could anybody, at this juncture, have understood what we could possibly have done, either of us, to help the cause of the Martians — save that now I had tried to make the best bargain possible with the Great Selfless Ones?

A sword of Damocles had been, or was being lifted from over the head of Tibet—and was swinging, certain-

ly, inexorably, over the heads of Deema and me!

What made it so difficult to bear was the fact that the sword was invisible, unpredictable. Deema and I could only hold hands and await the breaking of the thin invisible hair which held it above us.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE BLOW FALLS

**F**ROM that point on our contact with the Martians was attended by such solemnity as I never hope to see again, nor shall ever forget. None of us will ever forget. That we were building to a climax that might well leave us breathless I felt sure. So did the others, for what they felt was part of the tension in the atmosphere of that crypt of records.

Now and again a candle guttered out like a life passing. Now and again a flambeau crackled its resin. And the Martian and Funston, with Hsung Chun breaking in excitedly on occasion, talked of the Mirror, and what it would mean to earth to possess its like, its services to belong to all the peoples of the world.

We were only waiting, I realized, for the landing of the rockets on Mars, for the finale. When the Great Selfless One had received word of that, matters would march to their inevitable climax, which could not be changed.

Sweat was standing on the cheeks of Martin Funston. I think he must have realized that, depending on the whim of the Martian, his life might have been destined for snuffing out when he had displayed his unusual knowledge of science—especially as related to engineering. And no engineering could compare with the in-

tricate work that had gone into the building of that Mirror.

It had been built, incidentally, just to give some idea of the advancement of Martians over scientists of Earth, before the Valley of the Nile had suffered all those historical plagues of Egypt. Since that time the Great Selfless Ones had been studying the worlds of the Universe, and their secrets, unknown to us, must be many.

"How many languages of earth are known to you?" I asked once, diffidently.

"We have amused ourselves by learning them all," said the Martian, in English. "For our own part, at home, we use the language of thought. It is much simpler, and there are no shades of meaning to provoke argument—though we sometimes enjoy argument."

Now and again, as we waited and the tension grew, the Martian smiled enigmatically upon each of us in turn, as though he were enjoying a vast joke which he might or might not share with us.

Not once, since our coming, had any of us been out of the crypt—for down here was the fate of Tibet being settled. However, the occupying soldiers were not firing upon any more Tibetans. The Tibetans who had been excluded from their lamaseries by the moats, were encamped at safe distances, waiting—as all the world was waiting. Deema had sent no stories since she had come back, and the whole world, deprived of information, must be sweating with horror as we were.

The world would not have been surprised, I imagined—any more than I would have been—if a gargantuan explosion had suddenly blown Everest off the face of the earth.

That the Martians could do it if they wished, the world, now, believed.

The dead who had been destroyed by the bullets of foreign soldiers lay where they had fallen. Their loved ones were too bowed down with despair even to inter them.

Not that, in this high land of eternal cold, it mattered greatly. In some places the lammergiers feasted, of course, for lammergiers knew the meaning of death.

Tibet, all of it, might well have been a vast morgue. Only here in the crypt was there life, and it was the life of a world. Would it be given back to the world, or withheld?

Nobody knew but the Great Selfless Ones, and they were plainly not yet ready to tell us.

"You are quite sure you can duplicate the Mirror, Funston?" the Martian asked once.

"As sure as I am of my immortal soul," was the surprising retort of the great scientist who, I would have sworn, regarded the soul as the figment of superstitious imagination. Yet when I looked at him I knew he was utterly sincere. After all, considering what had happened, who could really be surprised that men had souls?

The Martian who had served as a herald for us, bringing us this leader of the Great Selfless Ones, suddenly appeared beside the *Kadakh* which was our contact with those on Amnyi Machen.

"The rockets have reached home," he said to the leader of the Martians.

Such a look of exaltation as I have never seen on any face, not even on that of the Living Buddha when he looked at the Dalai Lama, touched the face of the leader.

return to their ancient glories of the Great Selfless Ones," he said, his voice sonorous as that of some ancient priest who chanted of the glory of long-forgotten gods of great power. His voice rolled and thundered there in the crypt—and both the Living Buddha and the Dalai Lama told their beads with great speed.

Final instructions, we knew, were to be given about many things—about the copy of the Mirror, for instance. They would be given to Funston, of course. And then, for all I knew, he would be struck down. Though so great was the exaltation of the Great Selfless One, I could not imagine him causing the death of anyone, within sight of the Mirror.

The "herald" waited a brief moment for the leader to speak.

"It is time," the latter repeated. "Let our people be brought to us here in the crypt."

"More outlanders!" moaned Em-dap Muh.

The Martian laughed. There was a weird paean of triumph in his laughter.

"How very true," he said. "But have we not said that the Tibetans shall be punished? That which happens here in the crypt, is but an example . . ."

He broke it off there, as though afraid even he would say too much.

Then began the arrival of the Martians. One after the other they seemed to materialize out of nothingness, to crowd their corporeal forms into the crypt.

As each one came the Living Buddha spoke a name:

"The Gelong Ratap Tzel!"

But the Martian so named paid him no heed, because, of course, though he occupied the body of that

**T**HE time is near for the passing of judgment, and for the

Gelong, it was not actually the Gelong Ratap Tzel. As the Martian whom the Living Buddha called by that name, entered the crypt and saw the Mirror, he strode to the Mirror, touched it with loving hands — as though he were making sure nothing had happened to mar the glory of it — then touched those same hands to his forehead.

"Rama Hojar!" said the Living Buddha, as a lama of the Black Hat sect appeared, following the appearance of "Ratap Tzel."

Rama Hojar meant nothing to me, though naturally he meant something to Emdap Muh. An important lama, no doubt about that—had this actually been that lama. Rama Hojar himself, however, would never have ignored his Rimpoche and his Dalai Lama, and gone instead, with a side glance, to caress the Mirror, then to touch his forehead—a weird ceremony of, I guessed, re-consecration to the service of the Mirror of Mars.

Another lama entered, and was called by name.

Finally, when no more came, there were twelve Martians there in the crypt, and on the face of each and every one of them was that rapt expression which made me shape with my lips a set of words which had now begun to take on a strange meaning:

"The Great Selfless Ones!"

There was tremendous magnetic power in each of these Martians, and the aggregate power of all of them was such that I felt exactly as I had when I had stood on the verandah with Emdap Muh, just before the fire from nowhere had burned a moat about Godrang.

None even made obiesance to the leader, though there was no mistaking the fact that they honored his authority.

When we knew that all the Martians intended for this work, were here, the leader turned and bowed slightly to Emdap Muh, a bit more deeply to the entranced Dalai Lama.

"There are more of us, but they have already gone, after the fashion of our world! The bodies they used have been occupied again by the Tibetans who were displaced. They will be dazed, and wonder what has happened to the time they lost—for they will not remember where they have been, or what they have done in the dimension whither we dispatched them while we used their bodies. These twelve, including myself, are charged with the return of the Mirror. Therefore, we have need of the *Kadakhs*—which represent the only glimpse on earth of the sort of power we of Mars possess, a fact you must never forget, Tibetans! You have your *Kadakhs*; we have countless comparable things which are yet beyond you, including even more devastating instruments of war than the Fire Crystals!"

Now the twelve Martians stood about the Mirror, calmly preparing for the return, while their leader explained what came next.

Was this to be all? Were the Martians simply going to take away their Mirror, which they might have done at any time? Were we never, Deema and I, going to know what the service was they insisted we had done for them?

The leader looked at me, smiled slightly, perhaps even with a touch of sadness, as though he had been enjoying himself among us, and hated to go.

"Naturally you are anxious to know what you have done, for which we feel indebted to you. I shall try to explain. We came here to punish Tibetans for theft. We have done so,

with your help, Deema and Howard Davies!"

**M**Y heart was cold as a stone in my breast, for not even yet could I guess at what he was driving. He knew how all of us felt, and seemed to be enjoying the fact that we were on tenterhooks.

"What, Emdap Muh," said the Martian, "has been the most precious possession of Tibet?"

"It aloofness from the outside world!" said the Living Buddha promptly.

"And why has it remained aloof?"

"To keep its secrets safe. Its secrets of levitation. Its knowledge of reincarnation. Its proof of the immortality of man. Its secrets of longevity. Its knowledge, both scientific and spiritual—which Tibetans know to be one and the same."

"Exactly," said the Martian, his voice becoming grim. "And of what value would your ancient knowledge have been to the world, had you given it to the world?"

"Heaven forbid!" said Emdap Muh. "The world is not ready to receive it. It has been the ancient ambition of Tibet, to make of itself a library of all human knowledge, to give to the world when the world was ready."

"And who are you to decide when the world is ready?" the Martian leader almost thundered the question.

"I am a Living Buddha!" said Emdap Muh.

The Martian chuckled.

"For centuries Tibet has been the Forbidden Land. For centuries it has refused to allow outlanders across its borders. Even the Chinese, who conquered the land, were so harrassed that they were satisfied to collect tribute only—but never were allowed

to possess the inmost secrets of your metaphysical lore."

"And thus," said Emdap Muh grimly, "it shall be again! For here in this crypt, and others like it throughout Tibet, are the ancient secrets, set down in language which only the Living Buddhas and the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama, can read and expound. We are the holders and guardians of those secrets."

"I wanted you to put it into words, so that all might hear," said the Martian. "Now then, for the work they have done for us, I have caused Deema Moray and Howard Davies to be married to each other. I have said it was but partial payment. The remaining payment is to be made now—though it is payment which shall increase in value to the end of the earth, through all the generations of Moray and Davies! I give to Funston the plans of the Mirror, which he can duplicate. But I insist that, forever, the descendants of Howard Davies and Moray, shall have the management of that Mirror—because of what they have done for Mars!"

**I** COULD not look toward the Living Buddha, nor the Dalai Lama. I did not even dare look toward Deema—for I knew, and she knew, what the Martian meant at last. We had been given a hint, hours ago—perhaps days ago, for all the track I had kept of time—and neither of us had seen it.

"I place the pictures he has taken, in the hands of Howard Davies," said the Martian, suiting the action to the words. "I place my plans in the hands of Funston, that they may have to work together to make the duplicate of the Mirror. And so has payment been made. And now, Emdap Muh, in a few moments all those lamas whose names you mentioned will be here,



standing about the Mirror, as we Great Selfless Ones now stand. Take care that they do that which has to be done, else we shall return at once, and what we have done to Tibet will be as nothing to what we shall do!"

"But what, aside from some killing, which nobody seems to regard as important," I said hoarsely, afraid they would go before Deema and I knew what abysmal harm we must have done to Tibet, "have you done to Tibet?"

I thought I knew, was positive I knew, but I wanted him to tell it—and get it over with. When the Living Buddha realized, the lives of Deema Moray and me would be worth nothing at all. But stay, we would have the plans of the Mirror—and thus would be guarded against all danger whatever! The Tibetans had risked so much for the real Mirror, they would be very careful for the safety of the possessor of the Mirror-to-be.

Now the Martian turned, and spoke grimly, savagely, to Emdap Muh and the Dalai Lama:

"For centuries, O Rimpoche, you and your kind had closed your borders to the outside world. Now, thanks to the help of these two—foreign soldiers have possession of every lamasery in Tibet, including the Potala!"

"We will pay them, and send them away!" shrieked Emdap Muh.

"Can you pay any nation for its dead, with all the gold in Tibet, O Rimpoche? You know you cannot. And if you believe that Germany, France, Japan, China and England, will withdraw their troops from Tibet simply because they are told the emergency is past—then it is time you learned the ways of the outside world! If you understood foreigners at all, you would realize that, with

the help of Deema Moray and Howard Davies we have not only ruined your most precious possession, your aloofness from the world, but have divided your country among the strong nations of the earth! And if you don't believe it, just try to persuade them to leave!"

Without waiting for an answer, having delivered his bombshell, the Martian turned, slapped his palm softly against the flat surface of the Mirror. As he did so, each of the others—forgetting about all of us, instantly—did the same thing.

It must have been a signal of departure, for in the next moment all of us knew that Ratap Tzel, Rama Hojar, and all the ten famous Tibetans Emdap Muh had mentioned, stood around the Mirror in place of the Martians.

Realizing what a blow they had dealt Emdap Muh before going—the greatness of the punishment that had really been meted out to the thieves of the Mirror—I dared not turn and look at the Living Buddha, the Dalai Lama, or even at Deema Moray.

Instead, numbly, I stared at the twelve Tibetans about the Mirror, noting how stupefied they were with amazement—else, certainly, they would have been aware of their Living Buddha, and their Dalai Lama.

Instead, like robots unable to move, they stared down at the black surface of the Mirror, plainly wondering what it was, and how they had come there.

I heard Funston swear, and it sounded as though he were praying.

I must not delay. Through these Tibetans, the Mirror must return, and the Martians—already back in their own world—would not like to be kept waiting.

I manipulated the *Kadakh*, which

by now I had learned how to use, even to send a dozen Tibetans to Mars, with a mighty Mirror. I gave them no time to think, Emdap Muh no chance to change the terms the Martians had made with us. In his desperate realization of what had been done to Tibet—of how it had actually been divided among the nations it had always forbidden to cross its borders—he might refuse to allow the Mirror to go. Might even do something to ruin it. I could take no such chance.

I did what I had to do.

## CHAPTER XIV

### HOW CAN MORTAL MAN BE SURE?

I STARED at the Tibetans, wanting to see just what happened to others, when the *Kadakh* was in operation. But it happened too swiftly. I was conscious only of a blur, a feeling of the exploding into activity of vast forces—comparable to the feeling I had when close to the fire from the Crystals—and the Tibetans were gone from the crypt.

So too was the Mirror.

Nothing remained of it but the mounting the Living Buddha had constructed. Everything connected with the Mirror had gone, borne out into space toward Mars, through the Heavside Layer, by twelve Tibetans.

That one Tibetan could have done it, I knew very well. That the Martian had insisted on twelve merely was additional proof of the preciousness of the Mirror. It proved to me, too, what my life work could give to the world, when Funston and I should have constructed a duplicate. I thought, back in my mind, of all the money it would cost, but there

would be plenty of rich men who would help.

I had done my job. Deema had done hers.

Now we must face the condemnation of the Living Buddha, and the Dalai Lama because, through our efforts, the privacy of Tibet had been invaded, and would never be the same again.

Feeling as though I carried the weight of the world on my shoulders, I turned to face Emdap Muh, and take my medicine.

"As your people would say it," said Emdap Muh softly, "Thank God!"

The faces of the Martians, in the presence of their Mirror, had been exalted. Their exaltation was as nothing to that which I saw on the face of Emdap Muh! I expected him to look at me as though he would, if he could, blast me down with the thunderbolts of Jove.

Instead, he probably had never been happier in his life!

But why, why? Why did I never guess how people would feel about things?

"My people who have died shall become world heroes," said Emdap Muh, softly, "thanks to you two!"

The Martians had thanked Deema and me, now the Living Buddha was going in for more of the same! Were both sides utterly crazy? Could both sides in a war come off victors? In my experience, actually, and reading, I had never even heard of one winner. Yet the Martians had been pleased, and now Emdap Muh was pleased.

"He said our borders had been opened, and he was right! He said that now the world would divide Tibet among its nations, and he is right. But Deema Moray, and Howard Davies, do you not see that this

will result in exactly what I hoped for, when I condoned the theft of the Mirror? You see, my dear friends, I know what is told in these musty old scrolls—and when the world knows of them there shall be no war, no disease, no unhappiness. I have hoped for five years that Tibet would one day be opened to the world, and the abundance of our knowledge given without stint to our brothers of every race and creed. Now, it has been done! Men have died, yes. But those who die are never lost. Our people who have died, and those among the foreigners who have been slain, have done that which will but add to the lustre of their immortality."

He was talking, mind you, not I! Yet. . . .

Might not the term "Great Selfless Ones," have a universal meaning? Might they not have meant to benefit all our world, rather than to punish Tibet?

**L**ISTEN to Emdap Muh.

"I'm glad we did not burn the bodies of our dead. Now they shall all be gathered together, buried, and their ashes placed in *chortens*, with the ashes of our greatest teachers down the ages! They have not died in vain, but gloriously. And when the foreign nations know, it is my prayer that they shall allow their dead to join ours, that all shall enjoy glory together!"

Well, there it is, and Emdap Muh believed it.

"But you are just one Living Buddha, after all," I objected, not because I really objected, but because I could not credit this swift turn of events with any or all of my mortal senses. "There are other Living Buddhas, and I understand that they have always opposed your modern

ideas, else they would have opened Tibet's borders long ago to all foreigners — all foreigners eager for your wisdom."

"Yes, I am but one Living Buddha," he said, smiling gently, "but have you forgotten that there is one whom even Living Buddhas regard as the mightiest on earth, to whose slightest wish they will listen as to divine law?"

Yes, I had forgotten. Now I looked at the nine-year-old Dalai Lama, and knew he could do it. Moreover, he was grinning with delight—exactly as any nine-year-old who has the world by the tail, or believes he has, is likely to grin! Yes, it could be done.

"And don't forget, Deema and Howard Davies," said Emdap Muh, still with that exaltation in his face, "nor will you forget, Martin Funston, when you are in need of funds for the construction of your Mirror, our Mirror, the world's Mirror—that Tibet has tons and tons of gold that has hitherto been idle. Which reminds me that it is time you got to work on your life job. Let's see, will you four, Hsung Chun, Martin Funston, Deema Moray and Howard Davies, kindly clasp hands, while I try to remember some one of the half dozen explorers in New York who have one of our *Kadakhs*? And don't worry about the members of your expedition. I shall pay them, and send them wherever they wish to go! Ah, here is a New Yorker with a *Kadakh*. His address is Fifth Avenue and Forty Second Street!"

And right after that, all four of us were back in New York; Funston and Hsung to begin work on the Mirror, Deema and I to realize that we were married, and in the midst of our realization to get all this written down before we could forget it.

The path of solid discovery is hewn by such individuals as my Uncle Ephraim. . .

# UP THERE

by MARTIN PEARSON

**I** DON'T think I ever knew what a rugged individualist could be until I came to my Uncle Ephraim's farm to recuperate after my escape at sea. I had been torpedoed aboard one of the convoy freighters to England, had been rescued after a long swim in the icy sea, had come out of the hospital in Boston after two weeks under instructions to rest up for a month or so before I could report again for sea service. So I had come to my Uncle's farm down in New Hampshire.

I last remembered my uncle as a cantankerous cuss when I had visited his place as a boy. I found that my childhood recollections did not send me astray. He was cantankerous, he was an old cuss, and he had the damdest attitudes and ideas I ever heard of. But I won't say he was crazy—no I won't say it. I don't dare after what I saw last night around Polaris.

When I walked up to the old farmhouse from the road with my satchel in my hand, I saw no one. The old but well-built house, the prosperous looking grounds impressed me; they looked solid and substantial. But there was no one in sight. From somewhere there came the sound of hammering and I walked around behind the farmhouse to see. Sure enough, Uncle Eph was there standing atop a stepladder leaning against a gleaming silvery airplane, tacking weather-stripping across the edges of the glass-enclosed cabin. It was when I noticed that the ship was marked with the swastika and maltese cross of the German Luftwaffe and was in fact a big Nazi bomber, that I dropped my grip and stood staring.

"Close yer mouth, yer catching flies," snapped my uncle's sharp voice, "ain't yer never seen an airyplane before?"

"But it's a Nazi airplane," I protested, "and what are you doing with it?"

Uncle stopped his hammering for an instant and gave me a glance of disapproval. He shot a stream of tobacco juice towards the ground, shifted his quid and snapped:

"No, it ain't a Nazi plane—it used to be and that's a difference for a fact. It's my plane now and I'll do what I dang-well please with it, no thanks to you."

I walked over to it and looked at it. It was in very good condition, seemed perfectly in order. My uncle finished his hammering and got down. He came up to me wiping his hands on a piece of rag.

"Purty, ain't she?" he said. "One of the planes that bombed New York t'other week. Run out of gas and come down neat as a whistle right here on my land where you see her."

"What happened to the crew?" I asked. Uncle's eyes twinkled and he spat another stream of tobacco.

"Shot 'em," he said. "Ain't nobody can trespass on my land without permission." He chewed some more and then went on: "Waited for 'em all to step out; it was early morning and they scared hell out of my chickens. I plugged 'em from the back window with my old bear-rifle. Didn't waste a shot, one, two, three, four, just like that." He spat four times in succession.

The old codger's eyes were perfect. Damn it, I could well believe he had done that. "What did you do with the bodies?"

"What did yer think I'd do with 'em?" he snapped peevishly. "I buried 'em behind the barn; I ain't no cannibal I ain't."

Before I could say more, he started walking briskly towards the house. "Come on in and get a bite to eat. Reckon you must be hungry."

**I** FOLLOWED him into the house. His house-keeper, a deaf old maid probably as odd as he was, nodded once at me and showed me to a room. I washed up and came down. Uncle hadn't waited for he was already shovelling up his fare with gusto. The man was in great shape for one his age.

After eating a bit, I asked another question that had come to me. "Didn't anyone object to your keeping the plane?"

"Some did," he said; "didn't do 'em no good though."

He took another mouthful and then went on. "What comes out of the sky or is found on my land belongs to me. That's the law. The sheriff tried to get me to give the plane to the government. Heck no, not me. I pay my taxes, I don't owe the government nothin' and the government never gave me no presents and I don't aim to give the government any. Besides I intend to use that plane myself."

"You can't fly," I said, "you never flew a plane in your life."

He finished his plate before answering that. Then he leaned back and pulled out his corn-cob pipe.

"Who taught Wilbur Wright to fly?" he said. "Answer me that?"

I couldn't and he went on: "I ain't no dumber than young Wright. I got books, I can read and I can see and I can think better than most. Heck, of course I can fly that contraption. Lessons is for niddle-noodles."

"Where are you going to fly it?" I asked.

"Gol darn, you're the most inquisitive askinest young cuss, ain't yer? But I suppose you would be being as how you're one of my own kinfolk. Well, I'll tell yer since yer ask. I'm a-going to fly it up to the sky and see what's going on up there."

I gasped and nearly choked on my food. "Wha—what! What do you mean 'the sky'? You can't, it isn't possible."

Uncle's eyes twinkled and he shook his head sadly. "Yer just as befuddled as all the rest, ain't yer? Never used yer head fer anything but a hat rack. I suppose yer believe I can't fly up as far as I plumb like?"

I finished my food before replying. Then I pushed my seat away determined to find out what the old goat had in his head.

"No, you can't," I shot at him. "After about 20 miles you won't find enough air to support the plane. There isn't any air a thousand miles up and there isn't anything to fly to nearer than two hundred thousand miles."

That didn't phase him a bit. "Rubbish," he snapped. "Fiddle-faddle! Have you ever been twenty miles up?"

"No," I snapped, "and neither were you!"

"Nor either was anyone else, young man!" he barked back. "So don't you believe all that some smart aleck tells you. And there ain't been no one a thousand miles up either to say there wasn't any air,

and no one ever measured anything up in the sky."

"Yes, they have," I shouted. "Astronomers have measured everything."

"Astronomers!" he snapped. "Do you know any? No, you don't. And I don't either. And none of 'em has been up there to find out and none of 'em intends to go up there to find out. Astronomers! Bah! Humbugs!"

**T**HEY PROVED it by telescopes and cameras and mathematics," I retorted in defense of astronomy.

"They proved the earth was flat five hundred years ago and it didn't prove nothing. Don't talk mathematics to me, youngster. Figgers is something that scallywags think up to fool honest folks. Can you figger an orbit or reckon the distance of a star?"

"No, I'm not that educated," I said.

"And neither is anyone else because it can't be done. There ain't no orbits and stars is all the same distance."

"What!" I shouted, "how can that be?"

"Why can't it be?" Uncle Eph came back. "They taught you all yer life a pack of lies until you can't see the forest for the trees. Why should the stars be different distances away? Why shouldn't they all be the same distance only different sizes? For years those smart alecks has been hoodwinking the public with fantastic nonsense just to get the yokels to keep 'em in food and clothing. Every time folks begin to get to thinking about why they should keep on endowing colleges and observatories, the old buzzards get together and come out with some new planet or dizzy idea or maybe they stretch the universe a few trillion miles or squeeze it in a bit—or maybe the, think up a fourth dimension and befuddle the people that way. Poppycock! Stuff and nonsense! They got the people so befuddled and fooled they can't think straight worth a shucks. But they ain't got me fooled, not for one minute they ain't."

"But it's logical and scientific," I answered weakly.

"Fiddle-faddle," he barked. He took a puff on his pipe. "That plane out there. That's logical and scientific. But this astronomy—why it don't make sense. Every hundred years they admit that what they thought was so last century ain't so this century. That right, young feller?"

"Yes, but science improves and they discard old ideas."

"Improves! Now that's a laugh! You mean they think up wilder ideas to keep the people fooled. Looky here—what's less fantastic? To think the universe is a finite infinity bent around in a fourth dimension no one can figure out, all full of billions of suns busting up atomically, whatever that means, and dozens of planets all whirling around criss-crossing each other while the whole shebang goes rushing through a lot of empty nothingness at crazy speeds like a hundred miles a second maybe? Or to think that the sky is just a land surface like a common-sense ceiling a few hundred miles up and the stars are just volcanoes or maybe the lights of towns and cities and farms. And the sun a blazing bonfire rolling across it along with the planets which are no more than three or four feet across? Now I ask you, think it over. Which is more fantastic? Which sounds more like plain horse-sense?"

**I** THOUGHT it over. Well, how can you answer that? Which is the more fantastic? Obviously the astronomers' ideas were. But did I dare admit it? I tried another angle.

"There are photographs of the stars and planets."

"Ain't seen any photograph yet that couldn't be faked," Uncle Eph demolished that line of reasoning.

"But it just couldn't be!" I exclaimed in desperation.

"Oh yes it could, and it is," Uncle Eph crowed triumphantly. "The whole world is being taken in by a handful of these fakers with their fancy stories and crazy pictures. How these smart alecks don't dare admit that meteors can keep coming down in the same place night after night if they don't come down from a ceiling just overhead?"

"They don't," I gasped.

"Yes they do," my uncle snapped. "And if the star-humbuggers' ideas were right that couldn't happen. But meteors often fall one after another night after night in the same township. Happened here once and there's lots of evidence. Feller named Charles Fort collected piles of evidence the astronomers wouldn't admit."

He got up. "I've talked enough about this. I'm going out. Got more work to do on my airplane."

I followed him out, my head in a whirl.

What was I to think? Was the whole world being fooled by a handful of men? It wasn't possible. It just *couldn't* be possible.

I watched Uncle working about the plane. He was carrying stocks of food and stuff into it as if for a long trip. Finally I couldn't contain my questions.

"The whole world believes the way the astronomers believe—they couldn't be wrong," I ventured.

Uncle shifted his pipe and stowed away a smoked ham. "Wrong again," he finally stated emphatically. "Do the peasants of China believe it? No," he didn't wait for an answer, "they don't believe. That's a quarter of the world. Do the peasants of India and the black men in Africa and the red men in South America and the poor people in Europe know about it or believe it? No, and that's half the world that don't believe it. So don't be so smart with that word world. Most of the world don't believe any such nonsense. Most of 'em would agree with me and other common-sense down-to-earth folks."

That set me back on my heels for a while. I wandered around thinking while Uncle finished the packing of the plane. He had already stowed away a large supply of gasoline and oil tins. It was obvious he was going to take off very soon.

He went into the house again and when he came out I asked him when he planned to leave.

"Tonight, soon's the stars come out so I can get my bearings. Waited for you to come so you could keep the farm in order till I get back."

I saw that he was carrying a couple of books with him and when I got a closer look at them, I was amazed to note they were Chinese dictionaries and grammars.

"Why the Chinese guides?" I asked. "You don't expect to meet any Chinamen up there, do you?"

"Why not?" he chuckled. "The Chinese call themselves Celestials and I guess they ought to know if nobody does. Reckon the people up in the towns up there in the sky are Chinese. Four hundred million clever people can't all be wrong about their own origin. I reckon I'll get along up there."

I think that floored me finally. I went about the rest of the afternoon silently, puzzled and confused. Uncle Eph finished his preparations on the airplane and then con-

(Continued On Page 137)



*This time I tugged with all my strength.*



# STARSTONE WORLD

Strange was the science of this distant land and stranger still the struggle between the two who kidnapped the man from our world and Sula, mistress of the starstone! A colorful novelet by a new master of fantasy!

Illustrated by Damon Knight

**T**HEY WERE two scientists—and not too well equipped, either—on an undreamed-of planet in who knows what unfathomed corner of space. How could they possibly have deliberately chosen me, out of all the billions of humans living on earth today, to be the subject of their experiment? Or they might not have been able to choose; it may have seemed to them like dipping a net into dark water and accepting whatever became enmeshed.

And I was the one who happened to be in the net's way.

**I** remember some children playing noisily in a street, especially a small boy so intent on catching a ball that he did not notice a car bearing down on him. As the machine's horn bellowed, I rushed off the sidewalk to push the child out of harm's way—and managed it all right. The car hit me instead, and the next thing I knew, the dreadful pain was fading away; stars were swarming past me—I was shooting through space like a comet.

But—an automobile had hit me! I ought to be lying on the street, with a curious crowd looking down on me, or perhaps in a hospital, a doctor examining me—and instead, I might

have been bodiless, only a head equipped with eyes. I felt neither heat nor cold.

**I** AM not a religious person. I don't believe in the after-life, and I'm sure that I do not possess an immortal soul. I think that our bodies are like radio receiving sets, tuned into a broadcast of—it is hard to find the right term—cosmic awareness; each machine modifying incoming vibrations according to its make. Shut off the station, break the machine, and the person is dead.

Suppose two different models were dialed in at exactly the same volume and pitch? It might explain telepathy. And it might also explain what happened to me. . . .

**I** recognized the moon: it was diminishing with distance below me. A flickering spark above me swelled into a gigantic opalescent orb; I passed it, and its size decreased until it was again a mere speck of light. A band of powdery stars lay ahead; it seemed that ages passed as I drifted toward them.

Very gradually their fiery flecks widened into monstrous moons which shimmered with rippling yellow flames. They held nothing but the seething fire; a tongue of it, licking

by **HANNES BOK**

(Author of "The Alien Vibration", "Web of Moons", etc.)

upward lazily, barely touched me, and I felt an intense anguish not so much of burning as dreadful psychic debility.

Something reached out of incalculable distance like a writhing thread. It snaked over me, winding about me as though I were a spool, and whirled me back in the direction from which it had come. Giddy, sick, I struggled weakly against it, accomplished nothing, and had to allow it to carry me on and on through utter darkness.

I thought that I heard a faint chanting of male voices; it was a strange minor monody, and I could not understand its words. It became louder, until it was almost deafening. Without warning, a sharp pain stabbed through me; I was sensible of cold, and aching muscles. My eyes flicked open. My body was here; I must have dreamed that flight through space—

Or had I? I lay on my back in an immense vaulted room which was feebly illumined by fires smouldering in intricately pierced braziers. Aromatic blue smoke hung so heavily around me that it almost obscured the gloomy walls, sculptured with rows of thousands of tiny marching figures. Unconsciously I thought of China's "Five Great Caves" whose every square inch of wall space is carved with representations of Buddha and his disciples—and such a horrible pang knifed my head that I groaned before I was aware of it.

I lay on something hard and cold, which I thought was the top of a large table, in the center of the room. Heavily robed, hooded men knelt around me, filling all the floor-space, their faces blank and white under the cowls. All of them were alike, rapt upon me; it was like seeing the same face endlessly reproduced in

mirrors, or looking through a fly's multiple eye. Their eyes dwelt on me without a flicker as they intoned their monotonous tune; I felt like the conductor of an a cappella choir. I imagine now that these men were drugged.

It certainly was not what you would expect in the way of a scientific laboratory, but that's what it was—disguised without doubt by a lot of superstitious hocus-pocus to impress the ignorant that it was a den of sorcerers versed in supernatural lore.

**T**WO MEN stood over me. The first was short and stocky, and wore a perpetual scowl. The second was as slender as an image in a cylindrical mirror, more interested in foppishly arranging the folds of his shimmering blue robe than watching me.

As I opened my eyes, the short man involuntarily stepped back, jerking his partner's sleeve. In sitting up, I noticed my legs; I was naked, and—those legs were not my own! Something had happened first of all to my skin—it was greenish-white. There was nothing especially wrong with the limbs I saw; they were sturdy and quite shapely, but a little short. I had the feeling of looking not at my own body but over the shoulder of someone else. I raised a hand, and saw that it was as unfamiliar as skin and legs; the fingers were shorter than I was accustomed to seeing them, and the palm much broader. Dazed, I touched my forehead, felt a quick pang, and jerked my hand away. I must have been badly cut or bruised in the accident. But where was I?

**T**HE TALL man in blue spoke to the short man, who was scowling

at me. "Silence the singers, Aibur, and send them away."

With something of an exaggerated importance—I could see that he liked to impress the man in blue—the little fellow raised his palm to the crowd, which immediately ceased chanting. The singers arose and glided somnolently out of the room, a few of them staring after me over their shoulders. I watched them go, and automatically rubbed the goose-pimples on my arms.

The short man reached down to a heap of clothes on the floor; he selected a dull-hued mantle and tossed it at me; I caught it. The tall, languid man helped me to the floor—and I saw now that I had been lying on a carved altar. I tottered weakly; the tall man's grip steadied me. Effeminate though his mannerisms might be, there was nothing womanish in his grasp.

I wrapped the cloak around me and saw blood on my head. My body was unmarked; exploring the wound on my forehead, I found it V-shaped, running from the bridge of my nose to my temples. The tall men drew my prying fingers down to my sides.

"Careful," he warned. "It will take time for that to heal." He faced the smaller man he had called Aibur. "Shall we examine him now?"

Aibur nodded and gripped my right arm; the other man took hold on my left. They drew me to a door and into a smaller chamber which, too, was illuminated by fires in braziers. Colorful tiles covered the floor; fantastically wrought chairs surrounded a small table on which, in a turquoise bowl, were what I imagined to be fruits.

The man on my left pointed to a chair and ordered me to be seated; I obeyed gladly. Aibur took a chair beside me and thrust his face close

to mine, searching my eyes with his.

"Yes, Yephor—we've netted someone besides Khorith," he remarked with satisfaction.

The man in blue shrugged carelessly, dragged a chair to face mine, and sat down. He leaned forward, his hands lax in his lap.

"I am Yephor, and this is Aibur," he said to me. "We are wizards, and we have brought you from wherever you come into our temple—in our city. We rule here. You understand?"

I bent my head in assent; he continued, "Our slave Khorith was—useless. Awkward in performing his tasks. We temporarily disabled his body, expelling his mind from it, for we were interested in sending the combined wills of ourselves and our followers out into the void in quest of some alien roving thought which, capturing, we could cage in Khorith's body, and from which we might learn something of use to us."

I said, "Either I'm in terrible pain, and delirious—or asleep and dreaming. This just isn't possible!" I did not pinch myself, knowing that it was feasible to dream a pinch's pain.

The pair exchanged mocking glances.

"Let him alone without food for a few days, and he'll find out it's possible," Aibur chuckled unpleasantly.

"It makes no difference to us whether he thinks he's asleep or not," Yephor replied, his fingers delicately stroking his chin as he eyed me.

I asked, "How can I understand what you're saying? You are people of an unfamiliar place—it seems foreign enough—but you speak the same language—"

Aibur picked one of the fruits from the bowl on the table and bit into it, munching with bulging cheeks. Yephor gestured airily.

He said, "Some acts, such as walking and swimming, become automatic and instinctive, once they are learned. It is the same with speech. True, thought governs one's utterance to a considerable extent: one must make an apt choice of words to insure being understood by others; but it is also true that in times of sudden pain or stress, a person cries out unthinkingly or instinctively — and in many cases, intelligibly. It is—the awareness-of-being-alive which remembers, but when a thought or deed has become habitual, it leaves an actual mark on the pattern of the brain. Though we drew you here from an unknown world, you can communicate with us because you are equipped with the instincts of the man in whose body your consciousness now reposes."

I couldn't help laughing, however shortly. "Now I'm positive that this is a dream!" I said. Yephor shrugged and looked away as though bored; Aibur's gaze lingered on him with something of speculation in it.

Aibur said, "I will allow this slave a few days' rest before probing the mysteries behind his eyes, Yephor. I'd rather have that wound of his healed before making any attempt—"

Yephor turned to him and nodded lazily. "It might be just as well to wait."

Aibur seemed amused at something secret; he arose from his chair, grunting with the effort, and moved heavily to the door. At his signal, two uniformed men appeared. When I say uniformed I mean similarly dressed; they wore kilts, breastplates of metallic scarlet, and ankle-length cloaks. Peculiarly notched rods hung from their belts; I never saw these in use, so I cannot say whether they were weapons. There was something unearthly about these men, but

whenever I tried comparing them with people I had known, I was tortured by swift, violent headaches. As soon as I relinquished my memories, the hurt ceased. It was very odd. . . .

AIBUR pointed at me. "Put this slave in the hall with the others," he said. "See that he keeps strictly to himself." He muffled his flamboyant cloak more tightly around himself, and with a quick glance backward at Yephor and me, he passed through the doorway out of sight. I arose irresolutely.

The two liveried men approached me and took me by the arms. Worried, I turned to Yephor and found him daintily patting a yawn. The men dipped their knees slightly in homage to him, and having received a condescending nod for answer, hurried me from the room. We passed through the ornately sculptured vault in which I had awakened; its spicy smoke hung low, like descending fog.

We went through a series of corridors which became less architecturally gorgeous, until the walls were without a vestige of decoration. Quiescent cones of fire, in pierced metal globes on tripods spaced a hundred feet apart, lighted our way, making fantastically patterned mosaics of light and shadow on walls and floor. I noticed no windows.

A fragrance of mixed lavender and pine tainted the air, and we entered a long hall, approaching a doorway guarded by men in costumes like those worn by my guides. They carried whips, which they snapped suggestively as I was led past them into a room the size of an auditorium. Under a dim overhead light I thought that the walls were decorated with vast horizontal stripes, but another glance revealed that these were bal-

conies. Mattresses were arranged in rows on the floor, like beds in a hospital ward; beside each was a small and in many cases crudely embellished cabinet, and a tall urn. The heavily sweet perfume welled from all around me, as though everything in the room had been sprayed with it.

On many of the mattresses, men sprawled listlessly; here and there a few of them were huddled together, whispering; they raised their heads to stare at me. Some were clustered about a pallet where a guard bathed the bleeding, whip-marked back of a moaning naked man. There were only men present: they wore loose garments which were shirt and trousers in one.

I heard a baby's cry, and looked up to the balcony from which it had come. Women were peering timidly over the high railings, their faces dim in the murk. As some of them withdrew from my curious gaze, others took their places. The two men in charge of me let go of my arms, and one of them pointed at a mattress.

"No, that's taken," the other remarked.

The first man indicated the pallet beyond it. "Use that one, then," he told me.

I sat on the mat which he had assigned me; it was quite soft. The two uniformed men nodded satisfaction to each other, and withdrew from the room, lingering to converse with the men at the door. Several of the recumbent people sat up, turning inquisitive eyes to me, but when the doorway's guardians peered in, they looked away as if unaware of my existence.

I still thought that it was a dream, although an amazingly consistent one.

I WONDERED what was in the battered cabinet beside my bed, and opened its door. Inside were neatly folded bed-clothes, toilet articles, and a suit like those worn by the men around me. I looked into the urn. It held water. The guards at the door scanned me suspiciously and then withdrew.

I peered up at the balconies. The women were still regarding me, but as my attention lingered, they drew back out of vision. I watched the fellow in uniform bathing the moaning man. He nodded at me, but made a warning gesture as I arose and started toward him. Finishing his doctoring, he covered the sick man and walked out of the room.

Heavy shoes of extremely thick, black leather were folded in the suit in the cabinet: they were worn, and I wondered who had used them before me. I arrayed myself after the fashion of the others present. As I sat studying my surroundings, I heard the thunderous boom of a gong. Its echoes played tag through the room, and the light overhead flared dazzlingly bright. The drowsing slaves awoke. Some lay stretching and yawning; others arose at once, and, dipping into the ewers near them, sponged their faces and arms.

There was an instantaneous buzz of conversation. A man tilted back his head and called a name to one of the tiers above. Women's faces stared down, and several feminine voices answered tantalizingly in unison. A girl appeared at the railing and lifted a puppy-like child for the man to see; he waved, cooing at it. Many of the slaves whispered together, pointing at me.

The gong resounded again; the slaves hurriedly stood beside their beds, their backbones rigid and their

arms at their sides, as though at attention in response to a military command. I arose dubiously. The women disappeared above.

One of Aibur's men entered the room and approached the wall opposite the door. He pressed his hand against a badly soiled spot on it and a rectangular section of the plaster slid away, disclosing a lever. The guard lowered his whip and, fumbling at his belt, produced a key which he fitted into a slot in the lever. He returned the key to his girdle, pulled the switch, and suddenly the aisles between the beds gaped apart; massive tables laden with steaming food arose on a platform. The guard leaned back against the wall, toying with his whip. The gong reverberated a third time, and the slaves hurried to the tables, kneeling beside them to eat, chattering vivaciously as they assailed the repast. One of them scurried to the bed of the sick man and laid food within his reach, then scurried worriedly back to the table. The sick man did not touch his plate.

I felt no hunger, but the guard snapped his whip at me and jerked his thumb expressively toward the tables. As I knelt to eat, I doubted now that I was not awake.

The slaves watched every move that I made. One of them furtively exchanged his place with another to be nearer me. I was fingering a dish which looked like vegetable salad, and which tasted like stewed beef, when he whispered, "Have you—?" We heard the crack of a whip. The slave slipped back to the place which he had deserted.

The tables held plenty of food, but not much by way of variety. I sampled the little loaves: they were sour, and I laid mine down. The slaves dipped their cups into a central bowl

of red liquid; I filled mine and raised it to my lips. It smelled like bitter medicine, and I did not drink it. Disgusted, I watched the others obviously enjoying the meal. Except for their vigilant glances, they ignored me. At last I spoke to the one beside me; he pretended not to have heard. The one who had changed places with him leaned my way and whispered, "We aren't angry with you, or afraid of you. We're not allowed to speak to anyone with the Scar." His fingers traced a V on his forehead.

The man opposite us snapped, "Shut up, you!"

The first man ignored him. "People with the Scar are old bodies with new minds," he whispered, his eyes craftily narrowing.

The man across from him glared wrathfully. Turning, he lifted his hand high, summoning Aibur's sentinel, who swaggered to the table.

"He talked to the stranger," the man said, pointing.

The guard knitted his brows and waved his whip significantly. "You know the rules!" he warned the transgressor, who ducked his head quickly in assent and nervously tore a loaf apart, stuffing enormous fragments of it into his mouth.

The man with the whip looked at me. "So you're not hungry," he said. "Well—who can blame you! But you'd better leave these people to themselves. Go to your bed and lie down."

## CHAPTER II

### INTRIGUE

**P**RESENTLY the gong boomed. Lifting my lids, I saw the slaves leaving the tables, some of them surreptitiously

hiding bread under their clothing. They stood at attention beside their beds. At a second stroke of the gong, the guard returned to the lever and drew it back to its former position. The tables sank into the floor, which closed over them. At a third gong note the light on the ceiling waned to a feeble glimmer, and the slaves ceased all communication with each other.

One took a scrap of cloth and some sticks of pigment from his bedside cabinet and began laboriously to draw. Another pored squinting over a tattered fragment of a book, his nose almost rubbing the pages.

I closed my eyes again and tried to imagine my way out of this body that was not mine—out of the slaves' ward and into the sky. I thought that I looked down at the world I was leaving, that it looked like a prodigious lump of bloodstone.

Sudden pain—and something more—balked me; I seemed to strike an invisible wall. I could not break through it: flashes of intense green lightning flickered repeatedly across my sight, obscuring the stars. The wound on my forehead throbbed unbearably. The bloodstone world rushed up to me; I was falling. In another moment I was back at my starting place; defeated, I opened my eyes.

Aibur, clad in lustrous purple, and Yephor, still in his blue robe, loomed over my bed. The smaller man fluttered his hand derisively at me.

"Asleep? No, Yephor, he was trying to run away from us, already tired of our hospitality."

Yephor lifted his brows sanctimoniously.

"Well," Aibur was now speaking to me, "are you still so positive that you're dreaming?"

"I'll get away," I boasted.

Yephor bent forward. "Alas, you can't," he said. "When we made the incision which sent Khorith from our midst—and opened his shell to fresh and more interesting occupancy—we placed within it an amulet whose influence, like a leash, confines the body's inhabitant to a very limited zone. We cannot permit any of our occult-wise guests to steal from us like thieves and carry information about us to their native worlds. Unless we remove the charm, which we will not, you must remain in your present physical form until physical death, whose pain does strange things to your being, searing it, distorting it, making unrecognizable wounds of otherwise immortal memories. If you can remember who and what you were, after the death of your present shell, you may find your way home. But I am afraid that the forces released in the process of fleshly corruption will not allow it."

He smiled a shade too pleasantly, straightened, and glanced indifferently at the other slaves. "Come," he said to Aibur. "There are other things we must do."

Aibur plucked the blue wizard's arm and gestured toward the sick man, who had begun afresh to moan. "You remember him?" he queried. "The slave who will not take orders. A useless lump of flesh—as he is. But like Khorith's body, potentially a cage for a finer mind."

"We haven't any use for him at present," Yephor said. "Why, we haven't even started on this new man yet"—and he glanced my way. "Who knows what secrets he may show us?"

"We can always use another body to trap an errant thought," Aibur persisted.

Yephor shrugged, and when he answered, I sensed steel under the silk



of his voice. "Perhaps—but let's not concern ourselves about it now. We've other things to do."

The sorcerers ambled lingeringly down the aisle between the beds, discussing the slaves, who had become restless and nervous. At the door they were saluted by their attendants. After their departure, the men with whips stepped into the dormitory.

"Prepare for sleep!" one called. The gong roared twice.

At once there was a flurry of action, the slaves carefully but quickly putting aside the reading, carving, and whatever else had been occupying their attention. Stripping off their clothes and folding them neatly, they crawled under their coverlets and settled themselves for sleep. I imitated them. The guards glanced critically around the room, dipped their heads in satisfaction to each other, and stepped through the doorway. I heard the slam of portals and the rattle of bolts being drawn. There was a hiss of escaping steam. I had become accustomed to the perfume with which the ward reeked, but now I was abruptly aware of it again. It had become tremendously intensified and overpowering, like an anaesthetic.

My senses reeled vertiginously, and I slept.

**A**N UNREMITTANT crashing of the gong roused me; sleepily I half-raised myself. The slaves were awaking; they threw aside their coverings and arose, not putting on their clothes. The alarm ceased. The slaves gathered toilet articles from their bed-cabinets, flung their blankets over their arms, and stood exaggeratedly straight, as though awaiting a martinet's inspection. The doors rattled open.

A voice called, "First row!" and a line of slaves filed out. "Second row!" A second line marched away.

I was in the fifth row. We stomped down a long, windowless hall and emerged in a roofless walled yard into which the sun poured light like blinding acid. I blinked and faltered. A whip cracked; I flinched aside, stung as if by a bee. The whip smacked again. I faced the guard at the entrance; he raised a finger warningly toward my place in the line. Hastily I returned to it.

Before us were rows of lavatory troughs, in the background an open latrine. Sagging ropes hung across a bare space: at a signal from the guards, the men broke ranks to air their blankets on the cords. Over the high walls I glimpsed the tops of trees which were shaped like skeleton elms and which bore, rather than leaves, twinkling iridescent spikes.

There were no towels; when we had bathed in the icy water, the guards waved us aside. I followed the others, most of whom broke into an eager trot, through a gateway into a smaller sunny enclosure. Here the slaves began to wrestle, run races and toss lopsided balls back and forth. Some clustered together, slyly whispering amid coarse laughter; others whooped insanely and rolled about on the pavement, stretching greedy arms in the sun. Aibur's men were present, but for the most part they remained in the background. When I approached a knot of the conversing men, an overseer flicked his whip at me.

"Sorry, but you'll have to keep away from them for a while," he said, not unkindly. So I remained alone until perhaps an hour passed, when we were herded back to the dormitory and fed.

Then the slaves stood at attention

while the guards passed along the aisles, instructing each man as to his duties for the day. Upon receiving instructions, the slaves slipped from the room, until only the sick man and I remained.

"I'll take him there," I overheard one guard remark to another; the man's whip prodded me ahead of him through an increasingly pretentious tunnel into a suite of rooms whose walls were draped with opaline fabrics. Tall, rosy-paned windows were open: through them I glimpsed low white structures similar to pueblos; beyond them was compact woodland. Not more than a mile away, perpendicular cliffs reared into the grey mist of the sky.

Aibur sat on an embellished throne which occupied a platform against one of the walls. He wore a piebald mantle over a white robe, and held a stick of graphite and several long sheets of paper on his lap. The guard salaamed, the butt of his whip rapping the base of my spine. "Bow too, kyi!" he muttered at me. I didn't want to obey, but there wasn't anything reasonable that I could do about it. I bent reluctantly.

The priest motioned the man away and beckoned to me. As I approached, he took a cushion from his throne and dropped it at his feet. "Kneel on this," he said.

I knelt at his feet: his stubby fingers gripped my head. He thrust his face close to mine and peered through my eyes as though they were windows. I sensed something invisible entering me from him and probing the memories of my aboriginal world. An age crept past. Dust settled on my wide eyes; I blink, and the frowning wizard cuffed me. "Don't do that!" he snapped.

He stared intently again; I did not know what he saw. His writing im-

plement scratched the crackling paper. My neck began to ache; my knees hurt; tears dripped out of my eyes. At last Aibur said, "Enough. You may rest." I blinked until my eyes reverted almost to normal. The priest was poring over what he had written; I glimpsed apparently meaningless hieroglyphics on the paper.

"But what is it that motivates them?" Aibur asked himself, running a finger over the writing. "Let me look again," he commanded me. I raised my eyes and he peered into them, muttering impatiently, sometimes lifting his hand as though impatiently turning the leaves of a book. He sank back, pushing me away, and stared at his notes. "At least, I will have models constructed; perhaps they will tell," he murmured to himself. I waited in silence. Finally his foot poked me. "You may go now," he said.

The guard was waiting out in the hall. He accompanied me back to the dormitory, where, almost at once, Yephor sent for me. In his grotto-like room, its ceiling dripping sapphirine stalactites, the blue-clad warlock peered like Aibur into my eyes, and wrote comments on what he saw. He flourished the length of pigment most elegantly, but I was no longer deceived by his apparent foppishness; I knew him to be far more dangerous than Aibur.

"So Aibur's been ahead of me again," he remarked pensively. "Well—he hasn't learned anything that he can use against me." He waved disgustedly. "Go now!"

I was taken back to the dormitory.

**M**ANY times after that I was the subject of Aibur's psychic research. I wonder now whether it was telepathy, or hypnotism—and why did the red-robed wizard sudden-

ly begin to point brilliant lights toward my face as experiments progressed? I recall answering innumerable questions, though what they were I could not remember afterward.

Much as I disliked these explorations of my fettered mind, I preferred them infinitely to the dullness of the slaves' sleeping quarters, where I could do nothing but eat, sleep, and wait patiently for the all-too-brief daily exercise period.

Once on entering the sorcerer's apartments I saw many models of machines which spoke to me of my unattainable—terrestrial self. There were dynamos, gasoline engines, printing presses, even a small telephone. As I studied them, homesick, the green flames in my brain almost blinded me, and I was forced to turn away from the little replicas and to dwell on more recent experiences. The painful flames promptly vanished.

Yephor occupied a throne beside Aibur's. He contemptuously indicated the models.

"What if you have duplicated them perfectly?" he cooed. "You can't find out how to set them into motion. You can obtain your research only from what this man has experienced—a partly written book. You cannot make the fuel which operates these mechanisms!"

Aibur nodded dourly. "But it has not been entirely wasted effort. Though I cannot make the fuel for these things, as you claim, I know from this man's memories what that fuel is like—if I were to stumble upon some here in our world I would recognize it at once. We will preserve these devices—perhaps we may some day capture a mind that will supply the information we need now. In the meantime, this man has sup-

plied us with all we can get from him. We've no further use for him."

"You plan on setting him free, so that he can gain his former physical shape?"

"No," Aibur replied. "You've seen how great his people's magic—in some instances—can be. The magicians of his world might use him to extract knowledge concerning us. We cannot risk that—at least not while Sula retains her share of the lost knowledges. Our magic must remain exclusively ours." He clenched his hands. "Sula! If only we could trick her into revealing what she knows—"

"What do you propose doing with this slave?"

"If we had time, we might amuse ourselves by torturing his body and watching the warping of his mentality through pain. Interesting yes—because we will have to face pain and death ourselves one day; we may as well know what to expect; perhaps a way may suggest itself to prevent our undergoing such an ordeal. But this slave—we will allow him to live until we have more leisure." Aibur motioned to the guard. "Return him to the others; he may now mingle freely with them. Set him to whatever tasks you like."

As Aibur's man grasped my arm, I broke away and stretched my hands to the two wizards. "Please!" I cried. "Let me go back to where I belong! I'll say nothing, nothing—!"

"You were happier there?" Tall Yephor flirted his scented handkerchief under his nose, and inhaled appreciatively.

I did not remember. However, I vaguely realized that at present I was being misused. While I puzzled over a reply, Aibur gestured peremptorily, and the man in uniform jerked me to the door.

**Y**EPHOR came for me in person and conducted me to the vaulted auditorium on whose stone altar I had first awakened in the slave Khorith's body. He took special pains that no one would see us going there. As before, it was dimly illumined by smoky fires in braziers. The blue warlock laid his fingers lightly on my arm, and smiled patronizingly.

"You wonder why I have brought you here? Because your life is in danger. My confrere is determined to put you to death. Selfish motive! We've watched hundreds die, and learned nothing. There are uses to which a live slave can be put—to our advantage, and—yes, to the slave's, too, if he obey us implicitly—as I'm sure you would."

I looked eagerly at him, trying to show by my expression that I was very reliable and that he would never regret his words.

He stood brooding down on me, his fingers coddling his underlip. Presently he said, "Of course, I could attempt an operation which would remove our charm from your head; then your will could desert this body and return to its own. But I have no time for that: we are preparing for a ceremony tonight. One of your fellow slaves is dying, and we intend using his body to trap another mind from—Outside. Besides, such an operation as could free you is fairly sure to be a fatal one. . . . There is only one certain way for you to regain your old self. If someone who has died, yet kept his identity, could guide you through the Maze—"

"The Maze?" I asked.

"It stretches through the universe like a gigantic cobweb, but it is not made of the forces composing Matter. Rather it is a web of pure negation. The chaos which existed before substance was created. No positive

force may pervade it, but must pass around it—and in this avoiding of the web, the streaming energies are fused together, their patterns of flow altered. The resultant conflicts produce variations of intensity, ultimately shaping what the wizards of your world call atoms, which are the base of all Matter."

Yephor toyed with an irregular blob of gold hanging from his neck by a chain. "The Maze," he went on, "is no flat nor simple thing—its veins thread the universe like the blood-vessels of a body. It was first observed and charted by our predecessor Nurnir when he was concerned with spectrology and electrodynamics. No live man can traverse that path and remain sane, but a thought which has endured the reversed processes of life—physical decomposition, or death—has become of the same stuff as the Maze. It can grasp living thought and draw it into the web, cloak it with its protection and carry it to any part of cosmos." Yephor sighed wistfully. "But this is idle talk. No mind can survive the inverted stimulus of death and still remember what we call life. It would be insane." But I thought that he looked craftily at me, as though he knew more than he was telling. What was his purpose in telling me all this? Was he trying to rouse my hopes to a pitch where my enthusiasm might be of some assistance to him?

"Then that is what explains magic?" I asked. "If the mind does live through the decay of the body, are there not minds of those who were crazy before death which can communicate, though perhaps incompletely, with those who know how to summon them?"

"Yes," Yephor purred. "To those who know how to summon them."

He laughed shortly. "I almost told you more than I wished." The remark sounded innocent enough, but later—when Zula told me about Nurnir, its true import dawned on me.

Abruptly Yephor became brusque. "Come, now—we're wasting precious time. I don't want Aibur walking into the midst of this little *tete-a-tete*. I am interested in your welfare, and I intend to hide you from Aibur, for a time—here in the temple."

**H**E DREW me to a niche in which stood a carved figure, a little larger than life-size. I couldn't understand at first why he wanted me to look at it, the thing was so fearfully ugly. He touched its eyes, and I saw that they were holes opening to the back of the alcove.

"Hollow," Yephor nodded, as I glanced an inquiry. "Hide behind it. You'll be perfectly safe. No one would dream that a slave could commit such a sacrilege as hiding here."

"This is—really a temple?" I asked, wedging around to the back of the idol.

Yephor smirked. "Aibur and I call it that—we've got to keep the superstitious fools under us believing that we're omnipotent."

I was behind the idol, now. I could see through its slitted eyes. Yephor was turning as though to go. I wanted him to know my gratitude.

"I'll repay your kindness, some day," I promised.

His lips curled almost in mockery. "Yes—you certainly will!" he crooned, and glided out of the room.

I stared perplexedly after him, then examined the carvings on the walls. They were very like the sculptures in the Yun Kang caves near Peiping, in China. Their confused elaboration tired my eyes, which I

lowered to the braziers. The flames lighting the room burned within transparent ruby globes. Bluish, perfumed smoke appeared from nowhere about three inches above the globes, and filled the great chamber with slowly eddying clouds of fragrance which were not of the sleep-inducing kind that I had known in the slaves' quarters at night; they sharpened the senses rather than dulled them.

I heard pattering footfalls. Two overseers conducted six slaves into the room; the slaves carried buckets of water, brooms, mops, and other implements used in cleaning. They sponged and wiped the altar slab as carefully and fearfully as though they expected it to come to life and bite them. Poor fellows—none could be sure that he would not be that altar's next victim!

One of them carried a sealed metal cylinder; unscrewing its lid, he took tongs and lifted glowing rosy spheres out of the metal case: upon contact with air the orbs began at once to gleam and smoke. The slave dropped them into the braziers. The room brightened; its smoke grew denser. The slaves washed the floor, and when the cleaning was done, the guards marched them out of the chamber, leaving me alone again.

I was hungry, and wondered if I might be able to steal something to eat—or would Yephor take care of that?

**I**NCE several guards entered and stared around suspiciously.

"Think the slave's in here?" one asked.

A second shook his head. "He wouldn't dare. Besides, there are no footprints on the floor: you can see it's just been polished."

"That's right." The guards nodded and went out.

# CHAPTER III

## MISSION

**A**HORN blasted shrilly. My ear caught a babble of voices, loudening as it grew nearer, like the roar of an approaching flood. I cowered against the idol, waiting for the inevitable. They'd found me, of course.

Aibur and Yephor entered the room, and in twos behind them crowded their disciples, all gabbling garrulously, and all of them carrying stoppered black flasks. They swiftly ranged themselves around the room, and over all their faces, like a veil, dropped an instantaneous calm, an utter selflessness. Like dolls they stood, waiting, silent.

Yephor and Aibur stood at the head of the altar; at its foot two of their men were stationed; each held a jeweled metal box.

I heard footsteps again, and the groans of a man in intense anguish. One of Aibur's police entered, carrying the sick fellow whom I had seen in the slaves' quarters. Aibur motioned a command and the sick man was laid on the altar: the guard looked around himself nervously, evidently not much liking the ceremony; he hurried out.

The two wizards bent over the moaning man and examined him.

"He's fit enough," Aibur pronounced, glowing. "His spirit is suffering more than his flesh. Well, we'll soon cure that!" He glanced at Yephor, who nodded abstractedly; Aibur's habitual scowl deepened.

One of the bearers of the gemmed caskets opened the lid of his burden. Aibur dipped his fingers into it, withdrew a knife and a blue-threaded needle. Automatically Yephor turned

and took a flaming green gem from the other box.

Aibur's hands described fantastic shapes before the recumbent man's eyes. The slave ceased moaning and lay motionless, apparently not even breathing. The scowling wizard applied the knife to the man's forehead, cutting a crescent from the right temple to the left. Simultaneously the disciples unstopped the phials they held, and from each flask a white phosphorescence surged upward in slender streamers. It did not blend with the smoke, but wedged snakily through it, uniting into a seething mass on the ceiling. The sorcerers' followers began to chant softly the same monody which I had heard on awakening in Khorith's body.

Yephor proffered the green gem—it was a thin disc half an inch across—to Aibur, who placed it in the cut on the senseless man's forehead and began to sew shut the wound.

The shining mist on the ceiling lowered slender fingers into the heavy smoke; the fingers began wagging like pendulums, and the assembled singers mimicked them, swaying as they intoned. I am sure that I made no sound in my hiding place—at least no sound that could have been heard above the singing. But one of the votaries looked my way; his eyes widened; he clutched the man nearest him.

"A spy!" he bawled. "A spy!"

The chanting slurred to a halt. The crowd faced my hiding place, silent and immobile. The phosphorescence dripped downward as though weary, as though the vibrations of the crowd's voices had propped it.

Aibur rushed at me, pushing the rooted disciples out of his way. He dragged me from behind the idol, and as I stood cowering, he raised a hand

slowly to my face. I remembered when his eyes had searched through mine among my memories. Was he about to do it now?

At once Yephor was hurrying forward. "So that is where the *byrat* has been hiding! He deserves the full punishment for poisoning our ceremony! Let him be buried alive!"

"I KNOW your trick, Yephor," the other warlock almost whispered. "You think that if you condemn him, I will try to thwart you by reprieving him! Well, he shall be buried alive—and without delay! Our rite has been desecrated. Just look at that!" He pointed to the ceiling, where the luminous mist had begun to merge with the scented smoke. There was an outraged groan from the gathering as all eyes followed the wizard's gesture.

Aibur trotted to his colleague. "A man's life has been thrown away in vain tonight—a perfectly good body wasted because of some whim of yours to protect this fool! Yephor, I have tolerated much from you, because you are important to me—but one day you will go too far!"

The blue sorcerer seemed blank with dismay. "Why, Aibur, I never dreamed that it would happen like this! I thought to divert myself from the everlasting boredom of routine by torturing this *yodk* with the hope of freedom—"

Aibur pressed his face close to Yephor's, and the blue warlock flinched from him. "You did, you say! I'd like to have you chained somewhere so that I could read what goes on beyond those eyes of *yours*! I warn you—for the last time—I'm not going to endure your treachery forever!"

"Treachery, Aibur?" Yephor was the height of outraged virtue—but

his eyes shone like frosty steel. The disciples waited motionless, jaws agape.

"You heard what I said!" Aibur choked with wrath, coughed, and gulped. "Yephor—you deserve impeachment!" He swept an arm at the disciples. "Leave us! You, Guarance, send in four of my men and have a coffin brought in." The heirodules dispersed timorously, looking backward, stumbling against those in front of them. Guards hurried in. "Watch this *kyi*—and Yephor as well!" Aibur howled, and rushed from the room.

So Yephor had been toying with me! I glared hate at him. The watchmen regarded us alertly. The blue wizard contemplated me indifferently, strolled to the altar, and casually fingered the dead man.

Aibur returned, two votaries behind him. From one he took a glittering cup; he lifted its hinged lid and passed it to me. "Drink it," he said.

I peered at the cup's contents. Viscous foam floated on a cloudy green liquid.

"Drink it!" Aibur put out his hand as though to tilt the cup against my lips.

I raised the cup to my mouth. Yephor turned my way, looked straight into my eyes. He meant to help me after all! Before I could sip the liquid, my muscles stiffened out of control. The cup dropped from my hand, and I toppled to the floor.

Aibur bent over me and drew my eyelids over my eyes.

"Good," he grunted. "You'll suffer quite a time before you can sufficiently recover yourself and try digging your way up through the ground." Feet tramped. "Ah, the coffin!" he said. "Lay him in it!"

Hands lifted me and set me none



too gently in a splintery wooden box. There was a hollow thump as a lid was clapped down; the warmth of light beating on my eyelids ceased. I heard the crunch of screws grinding into the coffin's wood. Then the box was lifted and carried for a long while; it was dropped without warning, jarring the breath out of me.

"Wait until the worms and *kyis* get busy on him!" Aibur gloated. "If only he could live to see them!"

I could hear picks in the ground and the soft thuds of shoveled dirt. It was so black in the coffin that I seemed blind.

Aibur and Yephor were talking; they were beside my casket, and each one of them drummed his fingers on the wood as they conversed.

Aibur said, "By all rights, Yephor, you too should die! Be assured that if you were less helpful in matters of ritual you'd be fed to the *yodks* for this!"

"This slave has broken my friendship with you!" Yephor protested. "He has made you doubt me! Well, then, Aibur, let me tell you that rather than bury him alive, I'd like to send him to Celeise and let Sula bury him for us—in her garden!"

Aibur chuckled involuntarily. "Yes, that would be quite a thing! I can't imagine a worse punishment than that! We must do it to Sula herself, sometime—if we ever get her jewel away from her so that we can capture her. Sula's jewel!" His voice caressed the words. "If only we had it!"

"Why not make a bargain with this fool? What will interring him avail us? Suppose we send him into Celeise, promising to pardon his crime if he brings back Sula's jewel to us?"

"You aren't thinking of yourself alone, are you?"

"Aibur, have you no regard for my feelings?"

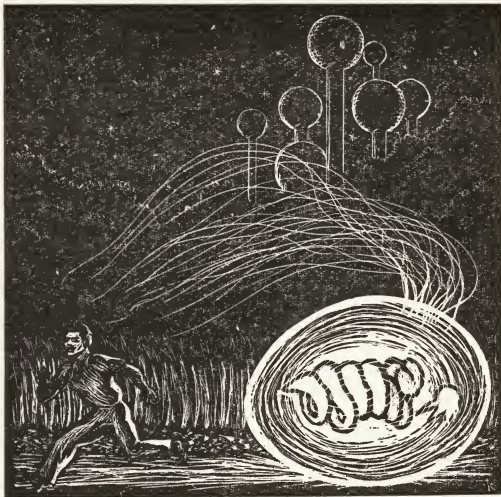
"Well, then, forgive me." But Aibur's tone was not contrite. "It is certain death for anyone to set foot in Celeise. Any man who can bring us Sula's crystal deserves pardon and gold—even this slave!" I did not like the way in which he laughed.

**H**E SHOUTED a command; the digging ceased. My coffin was lifted, carried, and placed down again. Its lid was wrenched off. Something cold touched my lips, and icy liquid ran over my cheeks and chin and down my neck. The power of voluntary movement returned to me; I opened my eyes. I was back in the sculptured shrine. The dead man had been removed from the altar. Yephor was bending over me, and Aibur stood scowling beyond him.

"Had enough?" Yephor took the vial from my lips. As I raised a hand to my face he whispered urgently, "Trust me still! Pretend to faint—now!"

I shot a quick glance at him. His eyes were imperative. I dropped back, banging my head on the casket's floor. Aibur hurried forward; I felt him prodding me.

"The recovery was too sudden; we must give the slave a chance to calm his nerves," said Yephor, his hands massaging my wrists. "Call a man and have this *byrat* taken upstairs to a cell." Aibur must have gone to the door, for Yephor murmured rapidly, his lips brushing my ear, "I had you captured intentionally; I wanted you sent to Celeise, where you may find freedom. If you can get Sula's jewel for me—" He turned alertly. "I will come to you tonight and tell you more," he husked, and arose. "Ah, Aibur. I'm glad you called a strong



*... one of the misty path-making things, its tendrils flowing ahead of it . . .*

man. I tried lifting this slave, but he's no feather!"

I was draped over a man's shoulder. Through lowered lashes I saw Aibur frowning at me and Yephor fastidiously rearranging the folds of his vesture. I was taken through a long hall and up a winding stair. At the head of the steps were rows of small cubicles, and Aibur's men threw me down on a pallet in the first of them. The door grated behind him before I dared to open my eyes. I heard a bolt slip into a socket, and arose. The sound of the guard's feet pattering down the steps grew faint and ceased; then silence.

The room was absolutely dark. A feeble line of light marked the lower edge of the door, but did not illuminate the room. I groped about and found the small table and ikon of a monkish retreat. Despairing, I sat on the pallet. Hours must have passed.

**S**OMEONE was approaching outside. The door opened; the hall's mellow light brightened the cell. But it was not Yephor who had come, as he had promised. Aibur, his face distorted by a wide sneer, beckoned to me, his scarlet robe's sleeves fluttering. As I advanced, his men sur-

rounded me, and marched me downstairs to an unfamiliar chamber. The damp air smelled mouldy; moisture had seeped through the masonry and stained the painted walls. As my escort halted, Yephor hurried in after us, no longer languid nor affected. To Aibur he said, "Why didn't you let me know you were sending him so soon?"

Aibur sneered, "You seem to have found out without my telling you."

Yephor approached me. "Open your mouth!" he said curtly. I obeyed, and he raised a hand as though he meant to thrust a finger into my mouth. Aibur rushed to us.

"None of that!" Aibur cried.

Yephor supplied an ingenious explanation. "After all, the theft of Sula's crystal is no unimportant task. You doubt my friendship—isn't that reason for me to question yours? Why shouldn't I want to know whether you've befriended this fellow, although seemingly hostile to him!"

"I might ask the same of you!" Aibur retorted.

"Ah, but your men can tell you that I did not visit the prisoner," Yephor said silkily.

Aibur replied, "They have mentioned that you tried to see this slave—and couldn't get past them."

Yephor appeared unperturbed. "It's too bad that I haven't men of my own to keep others from doing what I would like to do!"

Aibur lifted an eyebrow. "You think I've seen him secretly—is that it?"

Yephor nodded. "And so I should like to search him—to be sure that he has not been armed by you."

Aibur snorted disdain. "Armed—by me! Whose idea was it to send him to Sula? Go ahead and search!"

As Yephor's fingers probed my body, I thought that he tucked some-

thing into the pouch at my belt. As soon as he had stepped back, satisfied that Aibur had not given me anything, the other wizard advanced.

"What—?" Yephor raised a restraining hand.

"Merely to make sure that you didn't plant anything on him yourself," Aibur explained grimly. Yephor's hand was still on his arm; he shook it off. Suddenly, while the scowling man was exploring me, Yephor laughed.

"I see your wisdom, Aibur." The searcher stopped short, looking questions. "You planned it this way. You will leave something on him now, thinking that I will not search him again. You want the crystal for yourself, of course."

Aibur turned away from me. "You accuse me of bribing this *yodk*?"

"I'm going to search him as soon as you are through."

Aibur deserted me for Yephor. "Look, this can go on and on forever. You search, then I, then you, then I again. If this foolishness must persist, then I say let us bury this slave as we started to do, and forget all about Sula."

"Aibur, you're too wasteful with your slaves' lives. What good could come of burying him alive? What about Sula's jewel? We could use it!"

Aibur ruminated. "Yes—so we could."

"Then let's stop this silly searching and send him on his way."

Aibur cocked a shrewd eye at his partner. "You haven't possibly left anything on this man's person?"

Yephor raised reproachful eyes to heaven. He lowered them to the priest, and they had become indignant. "You searched him after I, didn't you?"

"Not all of him."

"Oh, well, if you choose to be unfriendly, go ahead and finish."

"You're offended?"

"Suppose I am? What can I say—except that your actions give me reason for suspicion—"

**A**IBUR whirled to his men: "Take the captive and put him back in the coffin!"

Smiling placatingly, Yephor countermanded the guards.

"Not yet, please," he said. "Listen, Aibur, aren't we behaving like children? As though we didn't trust each other? For all of me, you may search the man all you like. Only, I'd rather have the chance of getting Sula's jewel than mere momentary revenge."

The man in red sighed. "If you insist on my searching him, you can't have given him anything," he reasoned. "And whether you have or no, I am ever a match for your wits, Yephor."

"Is that a challenge?"

This might have gone on forever, but Aibur ignored the thrust. He signaled to his men, who dragged me to one of the chamber's walls.

Aibur took from inside his robe two pieces of metal, each about six inches long. Dangling one by a string, he struck it with the other. A peculiarly unpleasant cime vibrated through the crypt, echoing and re-echoing, fuzzing in my ears. I heard a subterranean rumble, and the wall before me trembled—a portion of it slipped down, disclosing a rude tunnel. Dazzling yellow radiance gushed into the room. I saw that a quivering web of aureate fire—like a flaming curtain—hung across the tunnel. The guards thrust me into the opening, but they did not follow. I looked from them back to the fire, and paused irresolute.

Something told me to glance at Yephor. His eyes stabbed mine a moment, then lowered to my pocket. I understood what he was trying to convey: he had left something in my pocket, despite his protests to Aibur. And if that something were of any use to me in the ordeal to come, he would expect me to give the stolen jewel to him in return.

Sula's jewel! They hadn't told me a word as to who Sula was, or what kind of jewel I was to take. I didn't know if I were being sent to rifle a gem-box in a cottage, or pluck a crystal eye from a stone idol. Yephor had appeared anxious to explain, and he had taken the trouble of supplying me with some sort of protection. Aibur didn't want me to know, evidently, confident that I would be killed as soon as I set foot in this mysterious Celeise—wherever that was.

**T**HE EXTRAVAGANT fullness of Aibur's red robe proved to be functional in design. He hid his face under the trailing cape and let the long sleeves fall over his hands, then entered the passage, brushed beyond me and broke through the fire. Immediately he stepped out of it and withdrew from the tunnel back into the vault where Yephor stood. The fiery web had been parted by his body, and as I watched, I perceived that the hole was closing. Two of the guards rushed in, grasped me and thrust me through the hole; they stood waiting with upraised knives lest I should attempt to come out. The gap grew smaller, soon I could not have put my hand through it.

The yellow splendor hurt my eyes. I divined that I had better not attempt forcing my way through it, since Aibur had taken the precaution of covering himself with the red gar-

ment. Experimentally I touched the vibrating web with the toe of my shoe. The golden light clung like shining pitch to the leather, which smoked most unpleasantly. In a hurry, I kicked off the shoe. The yellow fire devoured it until there was only a heap of ash; then the flame crawled back to the web and merged with it. One shoe was of no use to me, so I pulled off the other.

The hole in the web had closed. I was sealed behind the fire in the tunnel. I did not have time to look around me before I heard Aibur's voice—strangely distorted in its passage through the flame.

"You are now in Sula's territory," he said. He seemed to be just on the other side of the shimmering curtain. I stooped and recovered the lone shoe. Aibur continued, "You can't help but see Sula's palace as soon as you leave the tunnel. Get there unseen, if you can; steal her jewel from her rooms, and bring it back to me. There will be men stationed here to hear you should you call. Don't think you can trick us: if you come without the jewel, I will still bury you alive!"

I threw the shoe, hoping that the tenacious fire would cling to it and burn Aibur when it struck him. Though the missile left a slowly closing breach in the veil across the tunnel, I could not see beyond it. I heard a snort of surprise from Aibur, and a shriek from one of the guards.

"Missed me," said Aibur. "Well, that is all."

Turning from his voice, I stared ahead, where the tunnel went straight into blackness. Thinking of Yephor, I put my hand in my belt-pouch, felt something hard, closed my fingers over it and drew out a carved brass amulet. A chain was attached to it; evidently it was a pendant. Not being superstitious, I did

not wear it; after a cursory examination of it, I replaced it in my pocket. Why on earth had Yephor given it to me?

I proceeded cautiously along the tunnel. Now it was absolutely black. I stumbled, groped, and found a flight of stairs. At its top was a gate, which swung open at my touch. I passed out of the tunnel into what must have been starlight, but which to my darkness-sensitized eyes was almost daylight.

## CHAPTER IV

### LASCIMA

**B**EFORE me was a wide stretch of prairie, beyond it a forest, and—tiny with distance above the far trees—a castle which shimmered dully, as though cut from black pearl. Fantastically domed as though rainbow bubbles had been impaled without breaking on thick iron rods, it was everywhere ornamented with gayly colored patternings: polka dots, checkers and belts of spidery designs.

I looked behind me. The tunnel ended in a little structure something like a sentry box. It was crumbling, and sadly in need of repair. Beyond it the prairie stretched interminably. There was such silence that I felt deaf.

The tunnel-house opened upon no path. It was as if the passage had not been used in years. But farther away there were several paths crossing the prairie, intersecting and apparently much-used, for they were deeply worn. I waded through the knee-deep grass over to one of them which headed for Sula's castle. It was a strange thoroughfare, its outer edges as worn as its center, in which there was no rut. There was some-

thing peculiarly unpleasant about that path; somehow it reminded me of the smooth strip which one sweep of a razor leaves on a whiskered cheek.

The path curved suddenly, away from Sula's dwelling, but I followed it, thinking that it would soon turn in its former direction. A pile of evil-smelling rubbish lay in my way, and I leaped over it.

Far ahead, something seemed to be blocking the path. As I approached it, I noted that it moved, but sluggishly. I neared it warily. It was immense, ovoid and misty, like a gigantic cotton egg. It glided forward slowly; before it was the unmarked grass of the plain, but as it moved it cut a path through—and probably ate, for all I know—the grass. It made no sound.

It did not seem aware of me. Boldly I advanced within a few yards of it—and still without effect. Now that I was nearer, I thought that the thing was translucent and that I could discern vague outlines within it: wormlike looped intestines, and a rhythmically swaying thing which might have been its heart. Perhaps I was mistaken, but I supposed that I saw a rounded thing like a human skull, surrounded by long splinters of bone. . . .

I felt a breath on my cheek, as though a passing breeze had brushed it, and as I instinctively raised a hand to my face, I encountered several strands of gossamer. Clutching them, I drew back in astonishment. They were connected to the misty thing, swirling up transparently white, like delicate chiffon, from an opening in the thing's back.

I tried to release the strands in my hand and could not. They began to coil around my fingers, jerking at me; I was almost dragged off my bal-

ance as they drew taut. At the second jerk I pulled away, fell free, and began to run. Yards and yards of the cobwebby tendrils billowed out of the thing in pursuit like steam flowing from a surrealist teapot, but I kept ahead of them. When at last I dared to stop and peer behind me, the ghostly filaments were receding, like string being wound hand over hand into a ball.

Disregarding the remaining paths, I plodded through the grass toward Sula's abode. Observing a feeble glimmering a little off course on my right, I aimed for it. With proximity the glimmering became a series of waves of light, each rippling close behind its predecessor from a common point, filling the air with ever-rising bars of luminescence which dissipated a hundred feet above the ground. The waves surged up from a hillock of ragged glassy rocks which were like huge chips of crystal.

And now I heard a sound at last which was not of my own making. It was someone singing, but the voice was so characterless that I could not tell whether it was masculine or feminine. It was not a young voice, nor an old cracked one. Though the melody might have been based on an unfamiliar system of tones, like Oriental music, I fancied that the singer was occasionally off-key. The phenomenon of the rippling light had made me cautious, but if someone else was near it, and singing at that, I was not going to be afraid.

The song ceased; there was a hammering. I reached the rocks and sighted the caroler as I skirted them—she was an unkempt ragged woman, vigorous of motion, with strings of lank blonde hair falling over her pudgy face. She was hacking at the vitreous rock with a chisel. Approaching her from around the up-

thrust of stone was one of the misty path-making things, its tendrils flowing ahead of it and almost touching her.

**I** SHOUTED a warning; the woman dropped her work and stared at me. I ran to her. "Yo: fool! Get away before it catches you!" The misty thing's coils were swirling around the woman, who was gaping at me in surprise. Reaching her, I snatched her hand and dragged her away from the advancing thing. Its filaments fell away. We were on the other side of the heaped rocks before I released the woman's fingers.

"Don't you know that those things are dangerous?" I demanded. "If I hadn't yelled, you might have—" and then I stopped. For she was staring at me in a way in which no woman had ever contemplated me before.

I had a better look at her now: she must have been thirty, and pretty in a big-boned, slatternly way. There was something strange and indefinable about her eyes, which were blue and not very large.

She raised a hand to her cheek. "You meant to rescue me!" she murmured.

Peering to see if the misty thing had followed us, I replied, "I wasn't trying to kidnap you because of love at first sight, or anything!"

Her eyes narrowed fleetingly. "Oh, you weren't! . . . Didn't you know me?"

"No, I didn't," I said cheerfully, "and still don't."

Her eyes dwelt on mine for a long moment; embarrassed, I avoided them.

"You are not of this place," she said at last.

"No," I admitted. "Are you?"

She nodded. "I am Lascima. There are no humans—here—except Sula

and me. You know Sula?" I wagged my head negatively. "She is the witch who turned this place into the hell that it is, and she is proud of it."

The woman's eyes lowered a moment, as though they were searching hands; I did not know it then, but she suspected that I carried Yephior's amulet. At last she said, "I have not thanked you for saving me. Sula would want that beast of hers to attack me." As I opened my mouth for interrogation, she continued, "Everything here, animate or not, belongs to the sorceress Sula. Even I—whom she abuses for sport. She hates me! But she cannot do away with me. Her imps are always around me; she knows of every move that I make. Even now she is very likely aware of your presence here. Look!" She pointed suddenly. Swiftly turning, I thought that I saw a shadowy thing duck into the tall grass. I glanced back to the woman.

"What was it?" I asked.

"One of her—familiar," she answered.

I walked to the spot where I had seen the dark shape, and all around me in the grass arose a frantic rustling. There was nobody hiding; the grass had not been flattened. I was about to turn back to the woman when I glimpsed a second shadow pop up from the grass a hundred yards ahead, then quickly drop out of sight. I would have trailed it, but Lascima called me back.

"You'd never catch it," she admonished. "Sula lets them lead strangers around like that for hours—usually into the grip of one of the pathmakers."

"The what?"

"The beast from which you so gallantly rescued me." She eyed me coyly. "You are the first adventurer



in Celeise who has treated me kindly," she said.

"I thought that you said there were only Sula and you here?" I asked.

"I did. Sula makes short work of trespassers." She sighed. "Sula will probably make short work of you, too." She peered at me to see how I was welcoming this bit of news: I wasn't. "Of course," she added, "you've been kind to me, and I ought to return the kindness. I could invite you to stay with me a while: I could tell you much about this place, so that you'd have a fairer chance of reaching Sula's castle without being harmed than you'd have if you went right away."

"What makes you think I'm going to see Sula?" I demanded.

"All the others were. Why are you here, if you're not?"

"I didn't come of my own choice," I answered sullenly.

**A**LL THIS time the waves of light had been rolling up from the rocks, sending flickering gleams like firelight over our faces. Now the woman started back toward the spot where I had first seen her.

"Where—?" I started after her. "Be careful!"

She smirked over her shoulder at me. "I'm just going to collect the specimens of crystal which I was getting when you snatched me out of the beast's clutches."

I followed. The grass whispered; a quick look askance told me that we were being spied upon by a pair of shadowy figures which Lascima had called Sula's familiars. When I turned my face full toward them, they dipped from sight.

Stooping, Lascima retrieved the crystal chips which she had dropped when I had called to her. Concentric

bands of light pulsed outward from them, like the ripples of a still pond into which a stone had been thrown. As I bent over them, the woman closed her fingers over them. Puzzled, thinking that she wished to prevent my seeing them, I looked up; she was smiling amiably. I lowered my gaze back to her hand, and perceived that the rippling light throbbled through her fingers from the hidden chips; but the light had altered, becoming curiously blue.

Lascima thumped me companionably but forcibly on a shoulder. "Come along," she invited. "We'll go to my house. There's food there; if you're tired, you can sleep."

We left the prairie and entered a wooded tract. The trees were of the same species which I had glimpsed in Yephor's land, but they seemed distorted, as though seen through a corrugated glass. Suddenly, as though at a gust of wind, they began to sway, their outermost twigs rattling together as if in palsied applause, their spiky leaves rubbing together and squeaking. But there was no wind. Lascima, cognizant of my uneasiness, said, "It is only the imps' work."

I heard a distant thundering, and above it a mournful, monotonous piping. The thundering neared. Furtive shadows slipped from the trunk of one tree to another, passing us, from the interior of the forest. Lascima appeared indifferent to their presence.

"Aren't you afraid of them?" I asked.

She shrugged. "I can handle them," she answered.

The piping drew nearer. Long lines of the shadows, hands linked, flowed from the woods' depths like erratic smoke. The thunderous booming was close at hand; it came from a

thirty-foot drum which a number of dark things were rolling on edge over the rough ground. After it came diminishing groups of the black people until—except for an occasional solitary figure's flitting—we were alone.

Sight of the pulsing light from the chips which Lascima carried drew my attention from Sula's imps.

"What makes the light?" I asked.

Lascima gestured her helplessness at explanation. "I don't know. It is their characteristic, making light. Sula uses them in her magic."

"And you're going to try to duplicate that magic?" I asked.

She scanned me with playful reproach. "Nobody could duplicate Sula's magic," she said.

"But you can try," I persisted.

"Yes," she said absently, "I can try."

Magic! I laughed inwardly. Magic has always been the appellation applied by the ignorant to human arts beyond the layman's grasp. What could this poor woman, obviously a peasant, know about the strange sciences with which I had become familiar?

**WE HAD BEEN** walking over pathless ground, at times forced to push through thickets of ferns and flowering bushes; now we emerged on a narrow path. Lascima took the lead. In a few moments we emerged from the bosage to behold a ruined structure on the order of an adobe hut.

"My home," said Lascima.

The door was ajar, and before entering, the woman uttered a shrill hoot. There was a faint scuffling from within, and several of Sula's imps fluttered frightenedly through the doorway toward the trees. Lascima took my arm, and we entered the crumbling dwelling, I fearful and

alert, she completely at ease. The place was very dark inside, but the luminous stones which the slattern carried cast a flickering glow like candlelight. We were in an almost bare room. There was the low table customary with Aibur and Yephor, a few cushions with hairy stuffing projecting from rents, and several badly warped wooden coffers. I stepped upon some of the floor's litter of gnawed bones, scraps of firewood and tattered rags, and almost fell; Lascima's strong hand, still on my arm, steadied me. With a pat of her hand to ascertain that I was all right, she stepped from me and set down the shining stones on one of the wooden chests. She kicked a number of the cushions into a heap, and with a really elegant wave of her hand suggested that I be seated. I lowered myself to the pillows, and feeling something sharp under me stooped and drew a fragment of broken crockery from the piled cushions. I threw it away and rested again.

Meanwhile the woman was rummaging in one of the boxes. I heard the clatter of glass, a metallic clink, and the whisper of cloth as she drew several objects from the coffer and set them upon the floor. Banging down the lid of the box, she gathered the articles from the floor. Placing some dishes and silver on the table, she tossed a heavy bundle of fabrics at me.

"Here're some blankets," she said, as she threw them. "Make yourself comfortable; I'm going to get us something to eat."

From another of the wooden boxes she took bread—which I found to be very stale—and shrivelled smoked meat. She took a bucket from a peg on the wall, and went toward the door. I arose to assist her, but she motioned for me to remain at ease.

In a moment she was back with water, plus a jug which gurgled in the crotch of her arm, and a handful of little clustered apples that looked much like grapes.

"We could do with more light," she said, and brought a number of thick candles from another room. She lit them with what she called fire-stones: a pair of pebbles set separately in the ends of tongs which when brought together burst into flame. She placed the food on the table, shoved some pillows beside me with her foot, and dropped down with a jarring thud.

I was embarrassed at her difficulty in breaking the bread; after several vain attempts to crumble the loaf in her hands, she whacked it on the tabletop, making the dishes clatter. I did not eat much bread, found the meat tough and very salty, but I liked the little apples.

Lascima poured a bitter wine from the jug. She ate with her mouth open, rhythmically smacking her lips. With a last draught of wine, she banged her flagon on the table, wiped her mouth with the back of her hand, and lay back on her cushions.

"Tell me about yourself," she said, "how a person like you came to this place." All through the meal I had felt her eyes steady upon me, covert and calculating; as I told her my story, she watched me with the shrewd gaze of an owl.

"... Aibur and Yephor told me," I finished, "that if Sula didn't kill me, I should steal her jewel and bring it back to them; then they'd pardon me."

"AND you believe they'd let you go free! They'd kill you, of course, once they'd taken the jewel from you. But tell me which jewel

they specified: Sula has more than one, you know."

"They didn't say. Merely *the* jewel."

"Oh," Lascima murmured introspectively. "I suppose that they meant her crystal." She studied me to see whether the definition had meant anything to me. "Sula's crystal is made from that kind of stone"—she pointed to the luminous pebbles on the wooden chest, and I noticed that their light was fading—"but with one difference. Like plucked flowers, the chips of the shining rock wither and die. There is in everyone of the huge rocks a spark which generates the rippling light. What it is, who knows? Neither I, nor Sula—nor the wicked pair who sent you here. It's one of the secrets left from olden times. And it is this vital spark, which never dies, that Sula's crystal contains."

I did not relax from my attitude of polite interest, and she went on, "Sula can send her sight out on those waves of light—and more. She can project material things—deadly poisons, mesmerising perfumes—" She yawned, not covering her mouth. "I'm sleepy, but if you like I'll tell you Sula's story."

I bent my head in assent. She said, "You know the geography of this land? No? It was all flat woodland—once. But now there is an artificial mountain barrier, separating Aibur and Yephor from Sula's dominions. There's a tunnel under the barrier, true—the two wizards made it so that they could send spies here, perhaps to conquer Sula! A door of fire seals this passage—"

"I came through that," I said. She did not heed me.

"In the old times, people occupied all of the land; they were peaceful

farmers, interested only in getting enough to eat. Who knows where Nurnir came from? He was a sorcerer who had gathered all his knowledge into a book. He loved Sula, and it was his intention to marry her—so that his book of formulae, in view of what later happened, might have been said to have been hers; or that she was entitled to first claim to it. She expected to come into possession of it on event of his death, for Nurnir had no living kin.

"Yephor and Aibur had become friendly with Nurnir; he taught them many things, until they were jealous of his power. One night they stole into his house and killed him, taking his book — and thenceforth they were able to rule all the people—and they did, cruelly. They reduced the entire population to slavery, all except Sula. They had forgotten her closeness to Nurnir. Not all of his magic was written in that book; prior to his death he had been experimenting in a totally different field, and only Sula knew these later secrets. Aibur and Yephor tried to capture her, to learn what she knew—she fled them, came here, and set up the barrier of mountains between the wizards and herself. By the time Aibur and Yephor had tunneled under the peaks to attack her, she had summoned her imps to her—from an alien universe invisibly linked to ours. Their sciences were strong: she had only Nurnir's later magic to use against them — the battle ended in a truce." Lascima laughed wryly. "A truce broken by those two whenever they see fit to send a fresh spy in here—more to be rid of him than in the hope of gain.

"Well—the imps built Sula's castle for her; they attend to what menial tasks she requires done; in return

she gives them the peculiar rewards which they crave; being from a differently constructed universe than ours, their appetites are not the same." Lascima yawned again, making a luxurious moan of it.

"And you?" I asked.

She replied, "Oh, I! I was shut up in Sula's territory. She hates me; in her loneliness she amuses herself with spies in dreadful ways. She has found none worthy of her clemency—as yet. Me she hates most of all; she'd give all her power to finish me off, but so far I've managed to elude her." Her glance at me was speculative; did she expect me to be her ultimate saviour by some deed of mine against the sorceress?

She stretched luxuriously, and I heard the sound of ripping. Lascima fingered her sleeve. "This thing's about ready to throw away," she observed, "or else I'm putting on weight. Well—it's time we were asleep. Get up and I'll fix your cushions for you." She arranged the pillows into a pallet and threw the cloths over them. "There, that ought to do. Go on," she tugged at me, "lie down." She blew out the candles.

"Don't you undress before going to bed?" I asked a bit testily, wondering if she would leave so that I might remove my clothing in privacy.

She opened her eyes wide. "Do *you*?" she asked.

"Of course!" I replied.

"But don't you get cold!" she wondered. There seemed logic in that: the covers which she had given me were not very substantial. I lay down. "I'll tuck the blankets around you," Lascima offered, and kneeling did so. Her hand lingered briefly on my chest. Suddenly she bent and kissed me, then drew away and stood watching me. "Good night," she said. At the door she looked

back, as if expecting something; then I heard her in the next room, making herself a bed, before I fell asleep.

## CHAPTER V

### SHADOW OF SULA

**I**N the morning I was roused by Lascima's bustling about the room; she had made herself a broom of fresh green boughs, and was sweeping. The air was foggy with dust; I sneezed, attracting the slut's attention. She looked at me briefly, as though with distaste, and went on with her work. As I arose, however, gathering cushions and blankets to air in the sun, she spoke.

"Did you sleep well?"

"I had bed-partners in the middle of the night," I said, showing her the spots on my arm which were raw from scratching. Unconsciously she rubbed her hand on the back of her neck.

"Sula could get rid of those things in a jiffy," she said.

"Are you angry with me?"

"No; why?"

"You seem displeased about something this morning."

"Do I?" She relaxed. "I'm sorry. In a moment I'll be through, and we'll have something to eat." She turned back to her sweeping, and suddenly paused. "If you want to wash, there's a spring behind the house, on your left." I thanked her, noticing that she had cleaned her own face, which had been caked with what seemed the grime of years on the preceding night. When I returned from my ablutions, I found that she had just combed her hair and braided it, though rather ineptly. She was bending over the table, setting it, and at my entrance straightened and faced me.

"Why, Lascima, what've you done

to yourself?" I asked. "You're marvelous!"

Her face gleamed as though a rosy light had been directed on it, and her hand involuntarily fondled one of her braids. Her steady gaze embarrassed me, but I didn't like to turn away brusquely, belying my compliment. So I gave her a playful kiss. "If you don't watch out, I'll be falling in love with you!" I joked.

Her hand touched her cheek where I had put my lips, and she continued to stare. Then suddenly her arms shot out and she nearly dragged me off my feet in a powerful embrace. I tried to pry her arms free of me, but succeeded in only slightly loosening her hold. Her face was hidden on my breast; it dawned on me that she was crying.

She lifted her face: red and shining with tears, it was absurdly like a plump child's. "I've been alone here for ages," she bawled—at which I almost laughed, for her voice was anything but tragic except in a very comic way; sad folk should whisper, never bellow. "I've been here for ages, and no one has ever kissed me before!" Small wonder, I thought, if she had cried like that in front of them.

But looking at her wet eyes, her twisted mouth, and feeling the sobs which shook the body which she pressed against me, I felt compassion and kissed her pityingly. She dropped her cheek against my shoulder, and her sobs ceased. After a few moments I disengaged myself from her now lax embrace. She turned away, ran the back of her hand over her eyes, and pointed hastily to the table.

"Let's eat," she said.

There were bread, meat, and fruit on the table again. As I struggled to down them, Lascima remarked

thoughtfully, "When you see Sula you'll forget all about me."

I was gallant. "I'll never forget you," I said. Then, not quite so gallantly, "You've done so much for me; I owe you an enormous debt for your kindness—"

"I'll guide you to the castle," she offered abruptly. "I have nothing else to do, and I like being with you."

"Fine," I said. "And if I can do anything in return—"

"That'll come later," she replied, "after you've either stolen the crystal or decided against the attempt." She lowered her eyes. "Have you heard of her garden? No? Then I'll tell you about it—Sula's very proud of that garden. Whoever has trespassed in Celeise is in it. Perhaps you will be in it, too, but not if Sula finds you as unlike the others as I have found you. She might keep you as a novelty for a while, at least, before planting you."

"Planting me?"

"She changes people into plants by some kind of magic. By virtue of a certain light, their bodies change from flesh to vegetable, and after they have tasted the earth, they—alter."

I frowned: "I grow weary of this 'magic' . . . after all, there's nothing supernatural about it. Even I might learn these sciences. Where is this garden?"

"In the court of her castle."

Now this of course was mere exaggeration, intended to impress me. I was certain that whatever science constituted Sula's sorceries was in good part hypnotism.

**T**HE meal over, we set out for Sula's castle. First we went through groves of the distorted trees, then over the whispering grass of a windy meadow. Lascima pointed out

a bright-hued little lizard which scuttled away from our approach. I wanted to track it down, but she warned me against it: the creature was a *byrat*, it seemed, corresponding to our terrestrial skunk. She also showed me a beautiful red flower of highly offensive odor which she called a *byrat-bulb*; it had been named after the evil-smelling lizard.

Irregular stretches of huge rounded rocks spread before us like gigantic cobblestones. Lascima indicated them. "At night they are alive," she murmured.

I glanced sharply at her, but she was serious.

"They split like pods," she said, "and lights come out which make strange music, and dance—"

"Sula's science?" I asked, but she shook her head. "Older than that," she answered. "Nurnir brought them from a lost place."

"Are they harmful?"

"Not to Sula," she responded ambiguously. I was about to question her further when she raised a silencing hand and cocked her head, listening. She frowned as she turned to me. "It's the imps," she said. "I mean the other world beings. Hear their drums? It means trouble when they beat that rhythm—they're up to some mischief. I'm going to see what it's all about. You stay here—you're in no danger, now that it's day. I'll be back soon."

Nodding imperiously, she strode toward the trees which bordered the meadow. I took a step or two after her, but she turned to wave at me, and motioned for me to remain where I was. She grew tiny with distance and was lost in the trees.

I could hear the drum but faintly. It sounded like the rumblings of far earthquake. Curious, I took a few paces in the direction in which Las-

cima had gone, then several others and still more until I was near the woods and the rumbling had become distinct. Lascima might be in danger, alone with those black servants of the sorceress, I told myself. Louder grew the thumming, vibrating in the air like beating wings, making the treetops and grass quiver. The trees thinned.

I looked down into a barren hollow a hundred yards in diameter. At first I thought that it was a well dropping to unplumbed black depths, from which two immense silvery pillars arose, and out of which the drumming climbed like sooty smoke of sound. Then I sensed movement in the blackness and saw that it was a thickly packed crowd of Sula's imps waving frantically and leaping up and down. They made no vocal sound.

Between the pillars stretched a prodigious web, more like a colossal piece of window screen than a spider's snare; caught in it were three imps, struggling to extricate themselves. In the middle of the mob was Lascima; I thought that the shadowy folk drew away from her as though in fear. She stood grim-faced, making snaky movements with her hands as though drawing a picture of something reptilian and loathesome. Her tattered dress was so rent as to be hardly on her body, as though she had run through brambles or been clawed by unfriendly hands. Though the shadows shrank from her weaving fingers, the drumming continued unabated.

"You dare!" Lascima cried to the imps. "You dare!"

**I** HEARD a shrill whistling, faint and far away. Lascima dropped her tortuous hands and stared to one side. The wailing augmented

like the ululations of a nearing siren. I followed her gaze and imagined that over the heads of the imps, like a wisp of black vapor, hung something which pulsed to, and grew denser with, every drum beat—as though the sound were food. Its vague outlines sharpened: it attained shape. It was one of Sula's familiars, but many times their ordinary size, a giant. From the head of every one of the imps, like a tethering leash, ran a thread of blackness communicant with the black shape.

Was it a monster summoned from another plane, or their combined, visible wills? After all, what were these people? Shadows? Certainly not substance—and yet, what is substance after all by the incredibly swift movements of energy?

The gigantic shape reached toward the net and the trio of frenzied imps which struggled in the swaying mesh. Lascima's eyes blazed; her hands filled the air with urgent gesticulations, but the black monster did not heed her, and the drum throbbed persistently.

Lascima tilted her head, gazing into the zenith, and sent out a call. Abruptly the drumming ceased, and the black giant hovered motionless in midair, as if frozen. Again Lascima called, and I thought that I heard an answering cry.

In the heavens a tiny light budded, swelled and unfolded into a flower of writhing flame. It enlarged, its fires brightening, until it covered a third of the sky; I was forced to shut my eyes against its intolerable radiance. But I heard Lascima's laughter and peered at her. She was rocking with mirth, one hand on a hip, the other pointing derisively at the frightened imps, some of whom were dashing out of the hollow into



the forest. The black threads which linked them to the floating monster trailed behind them, and the huge shape was dissolving—unravelling!—as they pulled away from it. From the three imps caught in the mesh came a mournful ghost of sound, as though not the atmosphere but telepathy carried it or the illusion of sonance. Lascima gestured reassuringly to them.

The giant had completely vanished by now, and the hollow was empty save for the slattern and the three in the web. Raising her eyes to the seething flower of flame overhead, Lascima sent up another cry. The turbid fires became momentarily quiescent, then continued to comfort. Lascima shouted again, and the swirling shape began to lessen in size and splendor. As it diminished, the woman faced the well; her hands flitted from point to point upon it, and suddenly she thrust both palms under it as it collapsed and fell into her grasp like tangled black scarves. The imps dropped free, and lingered briefly to kiss the slut's feet before scampering into the woods. Lascima deftly untwisted the strands of the web and rolled them into a little ball of blackness which she tossed carelessly on the drum. Looking my way, she observed me, and for a fleeting space her eyes were narrowed and menacing. As she ascended from the hollow, her gait held all the strength and belligerence of a man's.

"I thought that I told you to wait!" she demanded, arms akimbo.

"I couldn't let you go alone," I said. "You might have been in danger."

"I'd have asked your help if I had needed it," she said. Her eyes had been prying into mine, but now she turned away, relaxing. "What do

you think of the spectacle you just witnessed?"

"I haven't the faintest idea what it was all about," I said.

"THOSE blacks — Sula's companions," she murmured, "were performing an old rite which Sula has forbidden them. Cannibalistic — vampirish—" She hesitated as though uncertain of her words. "They can unite their inner selves into a large shape which would have fed upon those snared in the web until nothing remained of them; then the large shape would have returned to the individuals who created it, feeding them with the lives it had absorbed. Sula doesn't permit it because it means the thinning of the ranks of her ablest allies—though, lately"—and Lascima's voice became pensive—"Lately the little dark ones are not quite so trustworthy as before."

"And why is that?"

"They are tired of this place. They want to go back to the world from which Sula drew them."

"Can't they find their way back by themselves?"

"They might — if Sula's arts weren't too strong for them. The fiery thing which you saw in the sky is one of her later works, proof against even the devices of Yephor and Aibur."

"But why were you interested in stopping the rite? You haven't any special liking for Sula's familiars, have you?"

"I've told you that I know how to handle them—and at times they can be very useful."

"Does Sula know that you can command them?"

"Sula knows of everything that happens in Celeise, because of her

crystal—the jewel which the wizards sent you to thieve.”

“Then she knows that I’m coming, of course—” I sighed.

We had resumed our walk toward the sorceress’ castle, which loomed larger and larger above the trees, its black walls shimmering as though ghosts of opals were imprisoned in its mortar, and the irid bubbles of its domes like fantastic, Cyclopean eyeballs, vigilant and unwearying.

“You at last realize the futility of trying to steal the crystal?” Lascima asked. “You’re willing to come back to my home with me—to live with me?”

I pondered aloud: “I can’t go back through that curtain of fire in the tunnel. I’m homesick for my own world, my own body. I’ve got to get that crystal!”

“You fool! Even now she hears your words!”

“All the same, I’m going ahead. Maybe she’s asleep? Surely she can’t keep track of everything happening simultaneously in Celeise?”

“Then go ahead. We’re nearly there now. But don’t say that I didn’t warn you.”

**T**HE castle was indeed very close. We emerged from the copse and stared up at it. I noted now that its walls were cracked and decaying, that there were star-shaped splinterings in the spherical domes. The structure arose from a smooth butte, around which spiralled a narrow path. Like a moat, a black abyss circled the conical hill, and I could see no way of crossing it.

“Sula’s magic could get you across with no trouble at all,” Lascima said disagreeably. “What do you think you can do?”

I answered her with action; I strode to the brink of the abyss and

peered into it: there seemed to be no bottom. The chasm was easily thirty feet across, and though I can jump nearly twenty feet—with a good running start, of course—I had no chance here. I went to the woods and began searching for a strong piece of fallen timber. There was no dead wood anywhere at all, and I wondered whether Sula’s imps were her gardeners, or what.

Lascima was puzzled when I began to uproot grass, but as I began to braid it, she sensed my intention and sat down to help me, all the while smiling secretively as if I were acting in an asinine manner. It took us several hours to achieve a rope long enough to span the chasm, and we were hungry. We ate the hard bread and leathery meat which we had brought along with us, and then I carried our grass-plaited rope along the margin of the black trench until I spied a projection of rock on the opposite brink; I attempted to lasso it. My attempts further amused Lascima, and her giggling further disturbed me; as I turned hotly toward her, she took the rope from my hand. “Give it to me!” she laughed, and I surrendered it.

The slattern shouted something very rapidly; I thought that it was an unfamiliar language, but it was probably the names of the three imps which she had freed. After a moment’s wait, the three shadows flitted from the woods and to the woman. She pointed to the projecting rock. The black things nodded sagely, indistinct faces curiously turned my way as she whispered something to them. They huddled together near the verge of the pit; absolutely immobile, they seemed to be concentrating.

I saw a mist forming over their heads; it grew to a writhing tentacle

which floated, like smoke, across the abyss, and coiled around the rocky protuberance opposite. Lascima threw the rope, and as its end flicked against the rock, the black tendril seized it, held it, slowly wound it around the upthrust of stone and tied it. Lascima clapped her hands; the mist drew back across the chasm to the trio which had sent it, thinned and disappeared. The three imps arose.

"Thanks," murmured Lascima; a nod of her head toward the trees dismissed them.

She handed me the end of the rope. Tugging upon it, I found it secure.

"Sula could have made a bridge of light-vibrations," Lascima said. "Much faster than your way—and safer. You're going to cross now, and try to steal the jewel?" Her eyes were hurt. "Why won't you listen to reason—and stay with me?"

"Lascima, I can't just hang on here and be hunted down as you are," I replied. "Although, so far, you seem to have been doing all right for yourself. I don't see how Sula could hurt you much when you're in league with her familiars—"

"All the same, she's sworn to kill me," Lascima said. "I want you to know your dangers, of course. But—I like you. I'm lonely. You don't know how lonely I've been—" She was near tears. "Don't think that Sula will be as truthful to you as I've been; she'll always be on her guard with you. Once you see her, you'll never want to come back to me, because she's so beautiful—"

"Listen, Lascima, if I can help it, Sula isn't going to see me at all! Do you think I want her to know I'm about—"

"She knows already, and you'll see her all right," the slut said. "Please stay with me. If you're afraid of

Sula's hating you because you'll be in my company, I'll guarantee that you'll never be in any danger. With me you can know that you're safe—"

She was clutching my arms, her face close to mine. I tried to disengage myself, but her grasp was unyielding. As I opened my mouth to speak, she went on, "This morning you kissed me: didn't you mean it?"

"Surely, Lascima, just because I kissed you, you don't think that I'm in love with you—"

"Couldn't you learn to love me?" I thought of her Amazonian body, and must have unconsciously made a grimace of disgust, for she said quickly, "Then go to the witch!" She released her hold on me and stepped back, her eyes narrowing with resentment. "Laugh at me—as she does—because I'm ugly, and inferior! Can I help it if I was born in a body like this? Isn't my character of any importance?" She stamped her foot. "Oh, I hate you! I thought that you were kind—but what are you? Only a thief! What has Sula done to you that you should rob her—"

My jaw dropped in surprise. Now it was I who grasped her. "You're loyal to her!" I cried.

"I never said that I hated her," Lascima replied, eyes downcast.

"But she wants to kill you!"

"Must I hate her in return! Don't you think that sometimes I pity her—for her vanity—for her lack of understanding—for her misery over her self-treachery—"

"So you don't want to hurt her—and you don't want me to hurt her!"

"She's not done any harm to you."

"But Lascima! Can't you see! I want to be back in my own body, back in my own world! Only Sula's jewel, given to the wizards, can accomplish that—"

"Well, go ahead. And I hope she

makes a plant out of you. A byrat bulb!" Which was the same thing as naming a skunk cabbage.

## CHAPTER VI

### STARSTONE QUEEN

**T**HE slattern turned on her heel and pranced furiously toward the woods. I called after her, but though she almost turned, she continued away. Dropping the rope I ran after her; she heard my approaching footsteps and whirled to face me. Her face in its bliss of expectancy was almost beautiful. She stretched out her arms. "Oh, you do love me!"

"Well, now, I—" But as the glory on her face began to fade, I felt like a dog. I took her in my arms. "If you really want me to stay—" I said. Her face, close to mine, was honest, even if not lovely. Perhaps I could get her to wash a little oftener—

Our lips merged for a very long time; the sincerity of her passion began to have more effect on me than mere beauty might have had. Suddenly she pushed me away, smiling shyly.

"You can go now," she almost whispered. "I know that you're staying only to please me—and maybe that from pity only. Always, if you were not to go now, you would want to leave me. I couldn't bear things that way. So, go. But—show Sula the gentleness you have shown me. She may know of a way to send you home without your having to go back to the priests. Before you go, however, give me that talisman which Yephor gave you: knowing me, you won't need it, and Sula will know instantly that you have it, and feel enmity at once."

"How did you know that Yephor

gave me this?" I drew the amulet from my belt-wallet.

She took it. "You don't know probably that there's an element in this metal which blankets the force-waves used by Sula in her science—oh, it has only a slight sphere of influence. Nothing which she can do by magic can harm whoever bears it or is within a few yards of its emanations."

"Then why do you want me to leave it?"

"If you go to her as a friend, telling her your story, throwing yourself on her mercy—and I advise that—you won't need it. If you go as an enemy, her detectors will pick up the radiations and sound an alarm."

"What if they do? Her arts are harmless against this, you said."

"True; knowing that, do you think she'll wait calmly to surrender the crystal to you? Don't be a fool! I assure you that if you take the charm along with you, you'll not find Sula in her castle! Nor her crystal, either."

I considered: Lascima loved me, I was sure. Therefore, not wanting me to come to any harm, she was giving me instructions which I ought to obey. As I pondered, she slipped an arm around me.

"I can't fathom you," I said. "First you want me to stay, then to go."

"I wanted to see how you felt about me," she replied. "I wanted to know if you're as really worth saving as I thought you were when we first met."

"And am I?"

She rubbed her cheek against my shoulder like an ingratiating cat. "Yes!"

We kissed again; the more we kissed, the more I liked it. I began to wonder whether I was really homesick for my own body after all. I'd hated this new world mainly because no one had been friendly to me . . .

As I returned to the abyss, Lascima stood watching from the edge of the wood. I fastened the hither end of the rope to a heavy rock and after again testing its strength, slid my legs over the margin of the chasm and began to work hand over hand toward the opposite brink. Once my hand skidded, and I almost fell—but as if by magic I managed to reach up in time and save myself. Gaining the other side, I lay a few feet from the edge, panting. I looked across at Lascima. She waved, and I waved back.

"How was it?" she called.

"All right," I shouted over. I scrambled to my feet, waved again, and headed for the ramp which wound around the hill where Sula's castle reared. When I next looked back, Lascima had disappeared.

As I toiled up the spiralling path, I wondered why a stair had not been built straight up the hill. It would have saved much time and footwork. When I had finally reached the hill's summit, I had encircled it thrice. I speculated whether the entrance of the castle would be guarded, and decided that since Sula was all-seeing, it would not. Then, recalling Sula's rebellious imps and the fiery shape in the sky, I concluded that it might be protected after all. Should I try scaling a wall and entering through a window? As I was planning a course of action, Sula forced the issue by appearing at the palace door and beckoning to me.

**S**HE was tall, birch-slender, and though voluminous draperies cloaked her, they were so airy and thin that the slightest movement pressed them close to her body, revealing every lithe line of it. The opaque scarves were sky-blue, and the clouds of hair which swirled over her shoulders, and which at first I

thought were other scarves of a turban, so silky were they, were shimmeringly golden.

If it were possible for a master artisan to melt white rose-petals like wax and then mould them into the face of Titania, he could have created Sula's face. Her skin was very white, its shadows pinkly pearl-like. Her face was oval, and her eyes were like oval sapphires. Her pale mouth was very small and seemed pursed for a kiss. For a sorceress, she was not frightening at all. She impressed me as being a gentle nymph, harmless as an animate flower. I did not guess then that even her beauty was a product of her peculiar science.

She crooked her finger at me again, and I went to her. The blue fabric floated around her like twilight clouds. I could only gaze helplessly into her vast eyes.

She reached out and touched me; a thrill swept over me like oil spreading on water. She seemed aware of it, and smiled. Turning, she nodded toward the doorway, and spoke; her voice was high and tense, so much more a bird's than human that I had difficulty in understanding her words.

"I saw you coming up the hill. Won't you come in—and apprise me as to your mission?"

I was still petrified by her unbelievable loveliness; she plucked my sleeve, and I awoke to motion. We stepped over the threshold; my eyes swept the hall once—it was a cavernous place, with bands of tinted sculpture striping its walls—and returned to Sula: as they roved from her face over her body and back again, she intercepted them. I flushed, wondering if she could read my thought, and was about to look away from discomfiture when she smiled—provocatively—yes, and

placed a hand sensuously on her hip. My heart leaped; my eyes asked foolish questions which hers answered.

I stopped stock-still and she moved closer; her slender arm slipped around my back; she pressed herself to me and we kissed. Almost instantly she stepped away and waited a few paces in front of me, smiling maliciously. It took me a few seconds to come back to normal after that kiss, and inwardly I cursed my legs, which insisted on trembling. My heart was thudding as if it had become a sledgehammer pendulum banging against the walls of my body.

She took my hand, led me through the sculptured hall; we came to a door beyond which a stairway arose; dropping my hand, she preceded me upward. Like the perspective in an art student's drawing, the lines of walls and steps drew into a point with distance, so that I wondered just how high we must climb. Several times during our ascent the woman peeped back at me coyly; I felt a bit like Merlin, chasing the Gleam.

My thighs began to ache, but by the time we reached the top of the flight, I was moving like an automaton. Sula waited for me, and as I stood looking back at the steps which now seemed to descend to Hell itself, my knees almost buckled. Instantly Sula was beside me, her fragile hands attempting to steady me—a pretty gesture; she probably couldn't have held up a toppling doll. They lingered on my chest, thrilling me, and I thrust them away.

"Where to, now?" I asked. "I only hope it's not up more stairs."

She laughed, letting her head fall back, showing white teeth. "I didn't think! We might have ridden up by my magic."

"You didn't think of that as we came upstairs?" I queried.

"Oh, yes," she responded candidly. "Only—I thought that I'd rather see you a little weary and less amorous—" In any other woman the flute-like tremolo of her voice would have seemed affected, even ludicrous; but Sula was surely more bird than woman. Angel, rather.

She pulled my sleeve. "Come; we can't go any higher: we're in the top of one of the towers." The steps had ended on a roomy passage, along which she led me.

"Maybe your science can get you upstairs with a minimum of effort, but so can an elevator," I said—and wished I hadn't, for the green charm imbedded in my forehead sent ripples of pain through me.

**E**LEVATOR?" She frowned perplexedly: despite the pangs shooting through my temples I had to explain the word; it left me sweating and sick. "But that is more trouble than magic!" she cried. "Look!" She reached under the scarves which covered her bosom, and withdrew a slender gold chain from which hung a flashing diamond star. "With the aid of this I can command the elemental forces—the energies—in the air around us."

She turned the star over and over in her hands, her agile fingers pressing here, prying there, altering the shape of the thing, increasing the number of facets from which the reflected light danced prismatically. Suddenly a great clang—like the prolonged booming of a great bell—resounded not so much from the star as from the very walls themselves.

I felt myself gripped by something invisible; when I tried to thrust out defensive hands, I discovered that I was temporarily paralyzed. I was lifted from the floor as if meshed in a net gripped by an unseen hand,

and borne down the hall, Sula floating beside me. We were carried far down the passage to a door; apparently of its own volition the portal swung wide, and we were wafted into a room whose walls were hung with filmy textiles the turquoise tint of an autumn sky. Streaks of scented smoke oozed lazily from ponderous and ornate brass braziers.

The invisible hold upon me relaxed, dropping me to the floor. Sula stood near, laughing as she tucked the diamond into her dress.

"That isn't all that my star can do," the sorceress remarked, while I scrambled to my feet. "It can make many kinds of sound, dreadful heat, and a strange light—which I will afterward show you when I take you to my garden." She moved to a silken divan. "But now, be seated and tell me why you are here." She patted the space beside her, and when I did not sit as close as she had indicated, she moved nearer.

I told her my predicament, and as I spoke her eyes grew wide with interest. Suddenly she interrupted: "You want to get back to your body—!" She arose, motioning for me to stand also. "I'm curious to see what that shell may be to which you are so eager to return."

She brushed aside one of the hangings on the wall, disclosing another doorway through which we stepped into a smaller chamber cluttered like a store-room with furniture and inexplicable things built of twisted tubing, huge metal spheres, and oddly vascular fretwork of iridescent waxy substances. Small windows admitted dim light which was supplemented by a luminous globe on a tall pedestal. I thought that the light flickered, for the shadows among the furnishings had begun to stir. Sula murmured something in her treble

voice, and the shadows rushed past us from the room; I recognized them as the black folk which Lascima had named Sula's familiars.

**T**HE sorceress halted at a table and lifted the lid of a small coffer on it. Intensely brilliant ripples of light gushed from the box, like the rhythmically spreading light which had come from the enormous crystals where I had first met Lascima.

"Give me your hand," the sorceress commanded, and grasped my reluctant fingers. In her other hand she held the jewel. "By my knowledge I can extend the influence of the charm which fetters your thought until it permits unlimited psychic travel. The effect will be only temporary, though. Your thought must return to its present house, thanks to the charm in your head." She tapped my chest. "Now close your eyes." As I obeyed, something like a drab curtain slipped across my brain; I started involuntarily. Sula whispered imperiously, "Keep your eyes closed!"

The drab curtain disintegrated. Though my eyes were shut, I thought that I was seeing through their lids, for I discerned, if faintly, the room in which we were standing, and Sula looking intently at me. The crystal in her hand did not glimmer, however.

We appeared to arise from the floor and glide toward a wall. The stored things were in our path, and involuntarily I flinched from a collision with them, but as Sula and I met them, there was no impact: we passed through them! As I directed my gaze behind me to peer at them, Sula hissed pressingly, "Eyes always front!" and I saw that we were only a few inches from the wall; in another instant we had passed through



it. Our movement accelerated. Here came other walls, through which we passed; we were fleeing over forest-land as though on a magic carpet; we moved faster: the forest became a blur. Now we were in airless space, rushing through a gantlet of stars.

Far ahead glinted a speck of light: I guessed it to be the sun. It swelled with our approach like a nightmare growth, dazzling me; we passed it. I glimpsed a vast disc, and then, after a period of whirling blur, had entered the furnished room where I had lived, prior to my arrival on Sula's planet. There was no sign of my body; the landlady was cursorily making the bed.

I had forgotten that Sula held my hand, and when I tried to point, she shook my arm impatiently.

"That woman's my landlady," I said. "She ought to know what's happened to me; can't we ask her?"

"She can neither see nor hear us," Sula replied. "Don't forget, it is only our egos, our personalities, which are travelling."

"But what's happened to me? How can I ever get back if I don't know where to find my body?"

Disregarding my query, Sula murmured softly, "Nurnir! Help me now!"

A black curtain fell over my mind; when I unconsciously thrust up my hands as though to remove the blind-fold, Sula's fingers did not cling to mine. A dreadful sensation of being snatched up and flung dizzily by a whirlwind swept me; violently sick, green lightning darting before me, I fell. Opening my eyes, I found myself on the floor at Sula's feet; crystal in hands, she stood with closed lids like a sleep-walker. Perhaps it was an ephemeral illusion caused by my vertigo, for I thought that something hung in the air above the sorceress

—something like many thick black pen lines which persistently writhed, curiously angular, into complex patterns. It vanished almost in the same instant in which I had become conscious of it.

SULA shuddered as if an invisible being had shaken her, and raising her eyelids, turned to me.

"I warned you not to open your eyes!" she muttered. "Come—we've found your body." She reached her hand to me; we interlaced fingers. The smirched curtain fell over my mind: I could see with an inner vision. Again we floated from the room in the tower over the forest, faster and faster. Once more I glimpsed stars streaking past, the painful effulgence of the sun, the nearing disc which was my own world, and a subsequent blur. We came to rest in a white room. My body lay as if in death on a bed. A woman in a white uniform was writing something on a chart taken from the foot of the bed.

"A hospital," I explained to Sula. "A place where they take sick people. That car must have done something terrible when it hit me—" In my eagerness I strained forward.

"Careful!" Sula murmured. "What are you trying to do?"

"Get back into that body," I said. "Help me!"

"I cannot, now," she replied. "Perhaps later—with Nurnir's help—"

"But Lascima said that Nurnir is dead!" I cried—and drew away guiltily. In recounting my experiences to Sula I had omitted the slattern; until that moment I had not uttered her name.

Sula's hand drew me back to her. "A fine body," she mused, "and I don't blame you for wanting to return to it. What an interesting place

you come from! Strange sciences everywhere. The light—the wonderfully-made furniture—the clever cut of the woman's clothes! Now that I know in what part of space to find this world of yours, I think that I will visit it often—perhaps take up temporary residence in someone's person . . .”

**I** WAS whisked from the room and over the reeling structures of a city; we shot up among the stars. We reached the bloodstone world that was Sula's, sped over rolling woodland; I noted a spark which grew into the enchantress' castle; we were within. Sula dropped my hand, and I opened my eyes. She was placing the crystal back into its metal box.

Had it been hypnotism? There was no use in figuring out what had happened. Whether mesmerism, telepathy, actual journey of two disembodied intelligences through space, it made little difference. It had happened; I had to accept it as real.

Sula took an easy position on the divan, and I sat near her.

“And what else did Lascima say?” As I dropped my eyes, temporising, she wheedled, “You thought she was a slut, of course?”

I didn't know what to say. If this woman could replace my mind in its former vessel, I hardly wanted to antagonize her. She hated Lascima, the slattern had said; very well, I would be diplomatic and pretend to hate Lascima too. But as I remembered the woman who had sheltered me in her hovel, I could not lie convincingly. I said, “I—rather liked her.”

“You didn't find her—repugnant? Didn't she make love to you?”

“Well, yes,” I said uncomfortably, answering both questions.

“But you didn't love her—not as you'd like to love me?”

I regarded the sorceress' exquisite body, the lips which seemed so eager for kisses, and curbed an impulse to crush her against me and capture her mouth with mine.

“I didn't love her,” I said.

“I was watching you!”

“Through the crystal? But she said that Yephor's token neutralized your—magic!” I cried. Her uplifted hand silenced me.

“You will not go back to her, naturally, if I ask you not to go! If I offer myself in her stead?” The lovely witch arose and stood very close to me, her azure draperies fluttering at the movement and then settling revealingly against her like loving blue ghosts.

“She was helpful to me; she's waiting for me. I ought to go back to her,” I mumbled.

“But not if it means losing me!” It did not take the thought of playing politics to make me agree with the sorceress, for as her gracile hands touched my shoulders, and she brought her face to mine, I forgot Lascima, my yearning to regain my lost body—everything.

She straightened, smiling evilly, reached into her scarves and brought out the diamond star.

“Come along,” she said. “I am taking you down to my garden.”

Her unpleasant expression frightened me. It faded; I stretched out my hands. “Let's wait a while,” I murmured.

“So you want to kiss me—after admitting that you let that filthy Lascima make love to you!”

“I couldn't help it if she took it into her head to kiss me!” I protested.

“You could have told her outright that you didn't like it.”

“I didn't want to hurt her feelings!”

SULA made a disparaging, disdainful grimace which altered her mouth into a more kissable thing than ever; as I drew nearer her, she shook the diamond star, and I felt the invisible net of her enchantment close around me. We were lifted gently and carried from the room along a corridor, down a stair and through a suite of immense rooms, one of which I shall never forget; we seemed not to have entered a four-walled chamber, but to have emerged upon a polished jet platform under a throbbing starless sky. A muted booming, as of a mourning drum, pulsed in unison with the thought that linked things — Sula's imps? — shot through the air in serpentine coils. We did not move straight across this murky floor toward the doorway which gleamed, a rectangular spark, far ahead; I felt myself rising, being borne around an invisible corner, lowered, move sideways, then backward, again to a side and forward, as though we were being carried through an invisible maze. Sula raised the diamond high and opened her mouth to shout something aloft, but glimpsed my interest in her action, and shook her fingers at my face as though casting something unclean from them. A film of blackness closed over me; I could neither see nor hear. Our gliding motion halted for an instant, then resumed. The black veil writhed free of me and contracted into a little knot which vanished in midair. Sula's eyes mocked mine.

The door was near now, but still we did not approach it horizontally. We arose on a diagonal and it also reared up as if to meet us, the gleaming floor dropping away. We reached the doorway and passed into a consecutive array of gloomy vaults on whose walls hung dimly apparent

paintings and from whose floors uprose tarnished silvery things curiously like miniature Gothic cathedrals, feebly luminous gems like cluster of tiny lights surmounting them. Sula noted my interest in them, but did not explain their nature; I decided that they must be scientific implementations.

"The garden," Sula said at last, and pointed her diamond star toward a titanic gate to which we were advancing. The portals creaked apart, and we passed them. The force carrying us slacked its hold; I stood free of it as the sorceress cabalistically touched her diamond.

## CHAPTER VII

### SULA'S SECRET

IT WAS A courtyard in the palace. We were at the bottom of a square well whose black walls shafted upward until they almost met; from the moon-sized opening above fell only the faintest of lights. Rough pebbled soil was under our feet, and from it—not far ahead—sprouted thick distorted forms like scaly cactus which moved slowly, jerkily, as though in pain. They averaged seven feet in height.

"My garden," Sula purred.

We passed between an alley of the bloated spiky things, which bent toward us from the roots like suppliants. On some of them were waxen crimson buds, and suddenly some of these buds burst open with an audible crackling; a piercingly sweet perfume—unlike anything which I had ever scented before—assailed us, as if tangible. Sula stopped at once, stood rigid, inhaling, her face glowing with pleasure. The flowers wilted almost at once, becoming drooping

and brown; Sula motioned for me to follow her again.

The thickest part of this strange garden lay just ahead, and I detected action within it. Sula exclaimed sharply, and a number of her imps scurried out of the thicket; I glimpsed others hanging back, as if loath to go, but when Sula spoke again and reached for her diamond pendant, the lingering dark folk hurriedly joined their departing fellows.

The sorceress paused before a gnarled stalk which bore a mottled, evil-looking purple flower whose odor combined sweetness with an almost charnel stench. Sula nodded toward it.

"Pluck it for me," she ordered; as I hesitated, a premonition of horror chilling my blood, she repeated the command. I reached up to the bloom, grasped its short stem and wrenched upon it. "Harder!" exclaimed the witch, eyes glittering, her lips parting excitedly.

I jerked at the stem again, but still I could not break the flower loose. I shrugged my helplessness; Sula pointed commandingly to the flower. This time I tugged with all my strength; the knotty arms of the plant twitched spasmodically. The blossom broke free, and a spurt of nauseating green sap splattered me. I held out the flower to Sula, but she did not accept it. The purple bloom began to wither in my hands, losing color, shrinking. There was something strange about its texture, which was emphasized with every speeding minute—and as I suddenly realized that what I had thought to be a flower was in reality a scrap of human flesh, I dropped it aghast and stepped back, mouth agape; I stared at Sula. She smiled coyly, provocative as ever, but I felt no desire for her now. My hands were sticky with the

plant's sap; I looked at them to find that the green had become brown, and that the brown was growing warmer, redder—blood!

Then if this garden were sown with people—what did it actually look like to eyes uninfluenced by Sula's trickery?

Sula minced ahead and beckoned me. "I always hated that man," she said. "He was an especially odious spy of the wizards." She turned. "What, are you afraid to follow?" I skulked after her, numb with foreboding.

The growths began to thin out; we were almost at the far wall of the court. Sula furrowed the soil with her toe. "Yes, this is about the best place," she said. "Come here."

I took a forward step and stopped. "What are you going to do?"

She pointed to the ground which she had just spurned. "Come here!" she said again, her bird's voice shrill. I obeyed reluctantly; she held up the diamond. Her fingers twitched, and from the gem a ray of intense and somehow loathesome yellow light, like jaundice expressed in visible radiations, stabbed from it and touched my forehead like a burning finger. A dreadful pang forked me; I reeled. The ochreous luminescence had diffused around me like mist; I perceived Sula indistinctly through this haze. She loomed above me, her teeth gleaming in a sneer.

Beyond her I perceived the garden, but it had grown swiftly, or else I was dwindling. The quilled green arms of the shrubs were waving violently. Another pain racked me, and I thought that the plants changed, that all over the courtyard in the places of all the bulbous growths were human beings, faces pressed to the ground, arms and legs frantically flailing, bodies streaked with blood

which dripped from the marks of raking claws. A third stab of anguish struck me, and as I struggled to move, to run from this dreadful place, I realized that something was happening to my body. My skin was stiffening, becoming rough; my joints refused to function; I was seized with twitching cramps. When I saw the green leaves budding on my hands, I knew that I could not escape. I was being buried alive, Sula's fashion, as Aibur had hoped. I had come to regain my terrestrial body and lost even the makeshift one.

Lascima had warned me what to expect. If only she were here now to help me!

"Lascima!" I called. "Lascima!" My words ended in a rasping choke. My tongue tasted the damp soil and snaked hungrily into it. My head was wedged as though by brutal hands into the earth, and I could no longer see. The cramps ceased, and when I attempted to move, I found that I could do so only with great pain. I rested in cold darkness.

"You called Lascima!" Faintly I heard the witch's murmur. "Perhaps you do love her—after all!"

I felt the vibration of her footfalls as she moved away. For a space there was only silence and a bitter taste in my mouth.

Then I sensed a scurrying overhead, and the pound of many excited feet. Something scratched my body painfully; as I flinched involuntarily I experienced even greater pain. Talons slashed me again and again—

I knew who was doing it, of course: Sula's imps, returned to the courtyard.

And I was a human plant in Sula's garden!

thicket, sucking nourishment from the ground. Occasionally there was a slight rain from above, at which times Sula's familiars absented themselves. I had much time to ponder on the events which had brought me here. Most puzzling were Lascima's contradictory statements regarding Sula.

I was lonely and in constant dread of the return of the imps and their torture-diversions. I wept, but without tears. I swore that if I could ever break loose, Sula would regret it. I wished that I had stayed with Lascima.

I heard nearing footsteps; they halted directly over my buried head. Something touched me; I winced; Lascima's voice murmured, "Don't be afraid!"

Heat seared me; I writhed in torment and found that I was able to move with increasing freedom. My head popped out of the ground; I tumbled on my back. Wiping the mould from my eyes, I blinked at the dazzling light which I had once thought dim, and saw the slattern, dressed in rags, waiting with her hands shrewishly on her hips.

"You called for me when you needed me," she said contemptuously. "Well, I'm here. I've come to bargain with you." I arose with difficulty and faced her, teetering weakly, like a hospital patient leaving his bed after an illness of months. "Do you still love Sula and want to kiss me to spare my feelings?"

I gasped and put out a hand toward her which she thrust away. "How did you know—?" I began.

She held up the amulet which Yephoh had given to me. "Because I am Sula," she replied astonishingly. "Sula—and Lascima—both. I was born a peasant, the clumsy, ugly Lascima. Why do you think I became in-

**I** DON'T know how long I continued upside down in that dark

terested in Nurnir and his researches? Because I wanted to be beautiful, to be"—her voice broke briefly—"loved! I learned the arts of illusion first of all, and became—Sula! But Yephor's talisman nullifies even that illusion."

Laughing angrily, she hurled the bit of carved brass away, and when it had passed perhaps twenty feet from her, she became Sula, bird-like and beautiful; the tattered clothing turned to fluttering crimson gauze. As I gaped again, she laughed. "You like Sula best, don't you? Now you understand why Lascima met you on the plain and not Sula—why Sula hated Lascima and was able to spy on you despite the wizards' charm! I had to inveigle the charm away from you when you started for the castle, else you would never have seen Sula, for the amulet's emanations protected you from my influence. You wonder why I played the part of two people? At first because I could not help it." She sighed. "Then you seemed to care for me, and I thought that perhaps I had found someone willing to share my lonely world with me. But I thought it best to test you—as Sula—to make certain as to your worthiness. I tested you—and you are unworthy. I ought to let you rot in that garden of mine, but I can use you. So I have come to bargain with you. I will send you back to that body of yours in the world which our minds visited, providing that you deliver my crystal to the wizards."

I considered a moment. "Sula—or rather, Lascima—it's Lascima to whom I want to speak—I've done a lot of thinking while here. I realize that I did care for Lascima, more than I thought—"

Her mouth curled scornfully. "You mean, you're afraid to return to the

priests? You think that you can appease me with studied words?"

"But I mean it!" I said. "I'd as soon stay here—not with Sula so much as with Lascima—I am grateful for much—"

She lifted an eyebrow. "Including the way in which I—planted—you? Not that you didn't deserve it. Hear me now. Nurnir has told me that if you deliver the jewel, he will help me overcome the wizards so that together he and I can rule both this land and the one on the other side of the mountains."

"But Lascima said—" I began. "When you were Lascima, you said that Nurnir was killed by Yephor and Aibur!" Doubt possessed me. "Are you truly Lascima and Sula together? Or is this a trick?"

"No trick," Sula answered, and immediately became Lascima, rags, dirt and all. I almost shuddered at the transition. "I did love you—yes; but now that I know you for an untruthful person, I cannot trust you. I could not have you here."

I, too, decided that it were best to return to my hospitalized body rather than consort with a female kaleidoscope who might take it in her head on the slightest occasion to transform me into a plant or worse. Suppose I were kissing Sula and found Lascima in my arms instead?

The woman continued, "As for Nurnir—yes, he was killed. But he had been expecting treachery from Aibur and Yephor, and made preparations which projected his vitality into another dimension. I don't mind telling you this, because part of our agreement is that you will tell the priests nothing of this when you take the crystal to them." She looked around her. "We can talk at ease up in my apartments. What's your choice—to stay here as a posy, or

deliver the crystal to those two *yodks*?"

"To deliver the crystal," I said.

"Good!" She examined her smudged hands with distaste. "I am tired of being Lascima. Nurnir's science can kill that part of me for good—if he bests the priests through you!" She became Sula again and, producing the diamond pendant from draperies which this time were royal purple, she handled it; her motive forces lifted us from the ground. We were carried across the garden to the door, and as we went I peered back at the clustered shrubs, which stretched frantic arms after us as though pleading for release. From the blackness of the court's walls emerged the enchantress' familiars; they slipped in among the plants and began to torment them. Then we had passed the door, and I saw no more of the garden.

**W**E reached the chamber of the blue-hung walls and were set down near the divan. At our entrance, a pair of imps stepped from behind a hanging, one carrying a basin of water, the other, sparkling cloths.

"You'd better wash," said Sula, motioning to the imps, who began to pluck at my clothes, trying to remove them. I pushed the little black folk away—for shadows they were certainly solid enough—and hung onto my clothing protectively. Sula's laughter rippled. "You're modest? I'll screen you!"

She waved a hand, and streaks of purple haze appeared and hung in the air wherever her fingers swerved. She wove other streaks at right-angles to the first ones, so that almost at once I was concealed from her by the screen. Or was I? I felt a distaste for her tricks, and yearned to tell

her to be Lascima for a while so that she might give her slattern portion a badly needed washing. It must be fine, I reflected bitterly, submitting to the ministrations of the imps, to be able when dirty to transform one's self into a clean other-person. This gave rise to other speculations, including the question of what Sula did when Lascima had a toothache, so that before I knew it, the mould from Sula's garden had been removed from me and my clothes were returned to me magically refreshed and laundered.

The shadows gathered the towels together, removed the bowl, and left the room. One of them scampered back and knelt briefly before the woman. She nodded, as if in answer to a silent question, and her familiar snatched a corner of the purple screen and pulled it out of the room after him.

"What did he want with that?" I asked.

"They eat it," Sula answered. "Well, you look a good deal better. I'll give you this crystal" — she showed me a metal box—"in this case; you're to take it at once to the priests. Tell them that you stole it while I was asleep. Once it's in their hands, you've only to wait for deliverance—and I promise you it will not be long. For this is the crystal through which we sent our minds in quest of your body, and through which I can send more than minds." She stared beyond me, brooding. "I could change the priests into the things that were in my garden—with this—"

She handed the box brusquely to me. "Is there anything you need? You're hungry?"

"I would like a taste of proper food," I admitted. "My mouth still tastes of the dirt—" So, after I had



dined, I set out for the tunnel which led from Celeise to the wizards. Sula's craft carried us from the castle, across the black moat, through the woods to the great plain where humped the ruined entrance of the tunnel leading from Celeise to the domain of the sorcerers. I phrased a regretful goodbye, but Sula halted me in the middle of it.

"You'll be seeing me shortly," she said. "Now remember—fail in your part of the bargain and you'll never regain that body!"

**S**HE stood like a gossamer-hung statue, her rippling scarves making strange designs on the air, as I entered the tunnel. I felt my way cautiously, for it was miserably dark. Soon I perceived the glimmering of the far curtain of fire; I reached it and called, "Aibur! Yephor!" There was no reply except for a faint burring sound that I did not immediately recognize. Had the wizards anticipated Sula's scheme? Again I called, "Aibur! Yephor! Isn't anyone there?" The burring sounds, which I knew now for snores, suddenly ended. I heard feet scraping the pavement beyond the opaque veil of yellow lightnings. A startled voice, evidently that of one of Aibur's soldiers, called, "Who is it? Who's calling?"

I cried, "I've come back from Sula's castle; I've got her crystal, without which she is powerless. Bring Aibur and Yephor! Hurry!"

"In a moment! In a moment!" I heard the fool's feet clatter away from the web's writhing fires. There was a silent space. Then I heard a returning clatter of many people, exclaiming excitedly among themselves. Aibur called, "Be still, you dolts!" His voice came from near the web: "Who is it?"

"The slave you sent for Sula's jewel. I've got it—hurry—she's after me!"

There was an instant's pause.

Suddenly Aibur's hand, wrapped in scarlet, burst through the yellow flame, which slid over it like water on an oiled cloth. "Give it to me!" he ordered.

"No," I answered, "not until you let me in through the fire. Don't forget, you promised a reward if I got it!"

Aibur muttered something to himself. "Stand aside!" he called, "I'm coming!" His scarlet robe wrapped around him, he pushed through the web of fire, leaving a slowly closing hole in it. Removing a fold of the protective cloth from his face, he stepped over to me and held out his palm. "The jewel, now," he growled. "Where is it?"

I removed it from the metal box and held it up so that he could see it, but my fingers were nimbler than his, and when he swooped forward clutching the hand which held Sula's jewel, I tossed it to my other hand. Aibur stepped away, glowering.

"Sula's after me," I warned; the priest bit his underlip, wrapped the scarlet robe around himself.

"Follow me, but be quick!" he barked, returning through the fire. Alert for treachery — not that it really mattered — I peered through the slowly contracting opening in the flickering barrier before following him. My feet had barely touched the floor on the opposite side of the web when Aibur unmasked himself and whirled upon me, snatching at the gem. The web knitted together slowly.

"You *kpi*! Hand over that crystal!" Aibur signalled his men, and half a dozen came trotting up to him. I braced myself against them, back

against the wall, and as one lunged at my legs as if in flying tackle, I swung my foot and kicked him; he fell sideways, howling. Almost at once the others rushed me and dragged me down to the floor. Their hasty fingers tore at my clothing. One of them found the crystal and offered it to Aibur. "Here, Lord."

Aibur took the gem. He peered deep into its bright core from which pulsed the rippling light.

"Sula's jewel!" he cried triumphantly, and brushed past the men who held me.

"What about this slave?" one of the men asked subserviently.

"Let the man he kicked throw him into the yellow fire!" Aibur jerked over his shoulder. The men lifted me, though I struggled, twisting my body, flailing my arms and legs, butting with my head. I hadn't counted on this. I was raised and about ready to be swung into the flaming veil when I heard Aibur's cry: "Hold! Stop!" The men set me on my feet. "Bring the *kyi* here!" The guards led me down the tunnel to Aibur.

"THAT'S better," said another voice, and I saw Yephor arranging his robe as though he had just arrived in the underground crypt. "I agreed that you could bury this man alive, Aibur, but I did not say that he was to burn. He's brought you the crystal, I see—I owe him something for that—" He bowed slightly, sardonically, my way. "Hand me the jewel—I've a right to hold it too."

Aibur backed away. "I've got it, and I'm going to keep it," he warned. "Now that Sula's powers are mine, I've no need for you any longer, Yephor. I've endured enough of your tricks!"

Yephor drew himself erect; I had

forgotten that he was so tall. "So you intended from the very first to get the stone for yourself."

Aibur backed farther away. "Even as you, false friend!"

"But it was I who gave him the amulet! Without it, could he have reached the jewel? I doubt it! Let me have the crystal—I demand to see it!" As Aibur shook his head in denial, Yephor raised his hand and pointed two fingers. Aibur hastily flung the scarlet cloth over his head, shrieking, "Men, kill this evil priest! He threatens me with sorcery!"

Yephor's hand lowered in his surprise, and he stared at the men around him. They stepped forward uncertainly, glancing from the cowering Aibur to the looming Yephor.

"Kill him, I say!" shouted Aibur, dropping the scarlet cloth and pointing vengefully. Encouraged, the guards rushed forward, and Yephor's eyes widened fleetingly with disbelief, then narrowed to a squint of demoniac rage. He raised both hands toward the approaching soldiers, and I overheard him muttering, "You cannot come; your legs won't hold you—" It was probably hypnotism, but it failed him; the men seized him and he was indistinguishable in the general scuffle that ensued. A knife flashed; I heard a moan, and the soldiers parted from the huddled, gasping man, who choked as he attempted to lift his hand toward Aibur in a last bit of malefic activity, and dropped his hand in death.

Aibur gingerly approached the body. "Carry it away," he ordered. Then he raised the crystal again and stared into its vibrant heart; he seemed to be concentrating. Suddenly he dashed the jewel to the floor—it glanced across the room, and one of the men retrieved it—and swung upon me.

"Liar! That's not Sula's crystal—it's a counterfeit. It does not respond to me!"

"But that's because you're wearing an amulet," I answered hurriedly, as Sula had coached me. "Its radiations neutralize those of the crystal—"

Aibur held out his palm to the guards. "The jewel!" The man who had retrieved it placed the gem in the wizard's hand. Aibur's other hand ripped away the heavy brass fetishes at his throat, and as he discarded them, the stone's spreading emanations brightened. He peered into the gem, and his jaw dropped with amazement. Satisfied, he lowered the jewel, and pointed at me.

"Throw this slave into the fire!" he cried. The guard to whom he had entrusted his amulets held them toward him; he waved them away. Two of the men grasped my arms and hauled on me, when a protesting shriek rang from Aibur.

The wizard was staring into the crystal in utter horror. He raised one hand unbelievably, and became rigid. That was all. The crystal's pulsing light flickered outward.

Aibur's scarlet robe fell apart as though rotted by the years; it disintegrated as it dropped to the floor, where it crumbled to powder. Still the wizard did not move, his arm upraised. He did not seem to breathe. One of the men holding me murmured to the other: they dropped my arms. The man with the brass fetishes approached the wizard cringing.

"Lord Aibur!" he cried. "Lord Aibur!" He clapped a hand on the warlock's shoulder as if to shake him from a trance, and Aibur, like a figure of sand, collapsed into colorless grains at the touch, strewing the guard's feet and the floor near him with dust, in the midst of which lay

the crystal, still sending out its widening glimmers.

For a moment the guard stared stupidly down at the granulations which had been Aibur; reeling back, he screamed. The amulets fell from his hand; I sprang to where they lay and threw the chain of them down the tunnel, through the fiery web.

**O**UT of the pulsing crystal, riding the waves of light as if they were harnessed steeds, came the black familiars of Sula! They carried shadowy ropes which at sight of the soldiers they uncurled and threw like lariats. They poured from the crystal, enlarging with the spread of light, like smoke from a chimney, darkening the room as though a fitful lamp were casting monstrous shadows.

The soldiers huddled back against the wall, protecting themselves with knives and whips. One ran; the others followed. The crowding horde of imps rode the pulsing light after them, hurling their dark ropes, which clung to the fleeing men like octopus tentacles. Those of the imps who had snared men hauled them in hand over hand, while the others flowed rank upon ever-increasing rank out of the crypt in pursuit of the escaping guards.

A flung rope curled about my throat as if it were a living thing, and I was jerked toward an imp, who upon recognizing me released the loathesomely writhing thing from about me. He pointed after the others and nodded to me. I headed out of the vault; a pair of the black demons snatched me up and held me, though weakly, so that for a space I rode upon the waves of light out of the temple and into the sunlit streets of the wizards' white city. The imps could hold me no longer, and I

dropped to a cobbled road, along which screeching townsfolk milled. The riding imps leaped from their perches on the gliding light and flailed their whips, in which I now discerned eyes, and knew them to be alive . . .

The throng into which I had been dropped struggled among itself as its members fought to push the others aside in a break for concealment within the city's buildings. The whips fell upon them, tightening and crushing, or, obeying the tactile commands of the imps, carried their victims to the black folk, who pressed their mouths to the eyes of the captured. When the victims were released, they shrieked and sightlessly clawed the air, stumbling into each other; blood ran down their cheeks from hollow eye-sockets.

One of the live ropes coiled about me and almost at once whipped away. Its thrower pointed: I saw an opening in the eddying mob and took advantage of it. I found myself in a recessed doorway from which I could look upon the street. People from within brushed raging past me to join the crowd.

Abruptly the frantic howling stopped; the contestants became still as wooden figures. Iridescent mists raced overhead, casting opalescent shadows on the throng; I saw Sula gliding out of the sky, green garments fluttering like multiple fantastic wings. As she neared the ground she held up her diamond pendant. I heard a booming note—apparently within my own head—which shook my mind into depths of blackness. My body relaxed; falling, I saw that everyone else was falling, too. But when I opened my eyes, I was in the dead Yephor's blue grotto, and Sula was bending over me.

"What—where—?" I began, but

her uplifted hand checked my words.

"You wonder how you come to be here? I silenced the people—cast sleep upon them, with this." She touched the diamond star. "They sleep even as you have slept. When the time is more propitious, I shall rouse them. But first there are things which I must do to ascertain complete domination over them."

"Such as changing them into plants?" I asked. Her eyes hardened.

"You will not be here to learn. You've fulfilled your share of the bargain, yes;—and so I shall fulfill mine, and now. Come." We were carried down into the cellar crypt of the temple, into the tunnel of the yellow flame—but the web was no longer there.

Sula said, "It was no longer needed, so I put it in storage, lest later emergency arise." We passed out of the tunnel and upon the grassy plain of Celeise.

## CHAPTER VII

### RETURN

**T**HE PRAIRIE was black with Sula's familiars, around hulking blacknesses which proved to be drums. At our appearance they leaped and waved frenziedly in pantomimed excitement and eagerness. We floated into their midst, and were set afoot on a trampled space. Near me was a coffin; I drew Sula's attention to it.

"What's that for?" I asked.

"For your body," said the woman. "Hold still." She touched my forehead with her long fingers; I was powerless to move. "So—now you are leaving," she said. "The only man who was ever kind to Lascima! Even Nurnir loved only the Sula part of me."

She gestured wildly: the gorgeous raiment vanished; she was the slut once more. "It is thus that I will have you last see me," she murmured, "and it is thus that I shall last kiss you." She pressed her mouth to mine. "Now I shall make the signal over you, so that Nurnir looking from his other-dimension will know whom to take—and then I will hold the soulless body which you will have left—and perhaps I will preserve it to look upon at times—"

She stepped away from me. "The only one who was kind to Lascima!" she repeated.

Diamond in hand, she sketched a pattern in the air over my head. The drums nearest us began to boom, and those beyond them took up the beat until the atmosphere was filled with swelling sound. The imps blended together and were visible only as a ragged-edged mass. Sula turned from me and flashed her diamond at the heavens, calling "Nurnir! Nurnir!"

For a moment there was only the thundering of the drums, but as it grew still louder, even more insistent, the very air shook; I felt little gusts rhythmically tattooing on my eyes. A bolt of greenish lightning shuddered at the horizon, and after a space, another and another; then others, keeping time with the rumbling drums. The flashes brightened, became greater, streaking across the whole sky. They widened, until it was like looking at broad rivers of green fire cutting a blue-black plain.

The booming of the drums accelerated, and the lightnings flared in unison, so that it was one continuous flash which illumined us. The tumult had become so forceful now that the sound was visible, moving from the drums in widening nooses of darkness, reminiscent of Sula's crystal

and its spreading light. Was there an analogy concerning the two?

The persistent glare of lightning overhead widened in accordance with the tempo of the drums. With every crash a wave of blackness spread from each drum, and as these ripples met and interwove, there seemed to be a curious cohesion at every point of intersection, as though the linked darknesses and sounds were reluctant to break away from each other. They clung, tenuous, quivering like threads of sooty jelly, before breaking apart and rolling onward, forming a vast net which hung above the plain and which was strengthened, fed, by every successive drumbeat.

Suddenly all the heavens became vivid with lightning, as though a fiery chimney had been opened; Lascima dropped her arms and turned to me. Something fell through the green fire and landed on the shuddering web which I thought hung steady for an instant. What this shape was, I could not tell, for it moved too swiftly for the eye to comprehend, hopping from strand to strand of the swaying net, nearer and nearer to me. I knew only that it was very huge, the color of congealed blood, and that it seemed to contort with violent inner movement, as though it were a sack filled with contending abominations. Still paralyzed, I felt like a man tied to a railroad track, watching a locomotive bearing down on himself.

It struck me squarely, and before I had the opportunity of even thinking defense, I was strangely cold. Lascima and her imps dropped away; I glimpsed the now decomposing web of shadows; the river of lightning was narrowing.

Whatever it was that carried me—and I seemed wrapped in it—shook with alarm, and I sensed its intense

mustering of effort. We dropped out of the green radiance into starry ether: I knew this course, recalling the flare of the sun and the looming disc of my native world . . .

The thing released me and stopped short; I flew from it like a ball from a thrower's hand—on and on and on—to the hospital, to the still white shape on the bed . . .

**I** CAME out of coma to a crippled body. Strange joke! When the car hit me, it mashed me up pretty thoroughly. It wasn't until months later that I was able to get out of bed and struggle along on crutches.

I couldn't return to my old routine

of work; I wasn't any longer equipped for it. I had to find simpler work with poorer pay.

Sometimes I thought regretfully of the body which I had not wanted—there, on Sula's planet. If I had been given my choice between this form and that, would I accept it now? I knew that I would, and be glad of it.

Does Lascima—not Sula—remember? She said that she intended to visit my world often. Perhaps she is watching me at this very moment.

**S**OMETIMES I am tempted to go out on the street and step in front of another car.

—THE END—

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(Continued From Page 87)

ducted me around the farm, giving me instructions on what was to be done.

Supper came, night came, the stars came out.

Uncle came down in his heavy winter clothes with a fur cap pulled down over his ears. I went with him to the airplane.

He pointed up towards the North Star.

"I never thought that all-fired important star was pointed out clear enough and I'm fixing to do something about it. Keep yer eye on it," he said. "Well, time to be going. Don't forget to pick up the mail regularly."

"Hey," I yelled at the last minute, "you got a parachute?"

"What fer?" he snapped from the door of his plane. "Ain't nothing going to go wrong with me. Parachutes is for bunglers. Now if you'll just step up and turn that crank by the propeller we'll get started."

Dumbly I stepped up and started the propeller turning over. It caught on with a roar. Uncle slammed the door of the cabin shut, waved a hand and gunned the engine.

The plane jerked forward, started fast, swung wildly and jumped into the air as Uncle Eph threw the throttle on full. It soared at a steep angle and I expected it to crash momentarily or turn over.

But it straightened out a bit, turned to-

wards the north and started upwards in a steady steep rise towards the Pole Star. I watched it as it disappeared into the darkness among the myriad stars of the night.

I expected uncle to come back that night as soon as he found his airplane would not rise any farther than the stratosphere. I also waited in dread of hearing the phone ring and being told he had crashed somewhere. But nothing happened that night. He didn't come back and there was no crash.

All next day I thought about it and I convinced myself that I should have called in a doctor and had the old man restrained. There were too many scientists backing up the regular theories of the sky.

Yet all that day there were no reports of my uncle's plane. And that night and the next two days after.

I DON'T know what to think now. Uncle Eph never did come back and he hasn't been heard from unless . . . but I don't like to admit that possibility. It' two weeks now and the only thing I can't account for is that there are now five more stars in the handle of The Big Dipper stretching in an exactly straight line directly to the Pole Star. They were first noticed last night. According to the papers this morning, sailors hail them as an aid to navigation, but the astronomers have refused to discuss them.

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACTS OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AND MARCH 3, 1933  
Of Science Fiction Quarterly published quarterly at Holyoke, Mass., for October 1st, 1941.  
State of New York  
County of New York

Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Harold Hammond, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the publisher of the Science Fiction Quarterly and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 357, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, Harold Hammond, 60 Hudson Street, N. Y., N. Y.; Editor, Louis H. Silberkleit, 60 Hudson Street, N. Y., N. Y.; Business Manager, Louis H. Silberkleit, 60 Hudson Street, N. Y., N. Y.

2. That the owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding one per cent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a firm, company, or other unincorporated concern, its name and address, as well as those of each individual member, must be given.)

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3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: (If there are none, so state.) None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

5. That the average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the twelve months preceding the date shown above is—. (This information is required from daily publications only.)

HAROLD HAMMOND  
(Signature of Publisher)

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 13th day of November, 1941. Maurice Coyne (My commission expires March 30, 1942.) Notary Public, Bronx Co. No. 104. Reg. No. 10-C-42; Cert. filed in N. Y. Co. No. 162, Reg. No. 2-C-143; Cert. filed in Kings [SEAL] Co. No. 146, Reg. No. 2112.



# BOOMERANG

by BOWEN  
CONWAY

**"COME ON, get going!"**  
The man in the gray suit who had just shot the nominee for the post of senior Senator from New York waved his strange weapon at me and gestured toward the door behind us with his free hand.

I stopped being panic-stricken for an instant and looked around. There was nominee Schenken still staggering across the stage of the hired theater, blood streaming from a smoking wound in the vicinity of his heart. There was the confusion below the stage as many men leaped to their feet and began shouting themselves hoarse. There was the chairman banging his gavel for order. Finally there was the thin semi-circle of menacing faces closing in on us as we backed to the door.

I closed my eyes and then opened them again. No, it was all real. I had hoped that it wasn't, but there was nothing of the dream about all this.

"Come on, you!"

Again the gestures with the shining weapon and I moved backward until my shoulders were touching the closed portal.

The man with the gun, assured now of my complete physical compliance with his orders, turned his attention abruptly from me to my fellow delegates to the state convention. His aquiline face hardened and his lips straightened into a thin line.

"If any of you so much as move a muscle until we get behind that door, I'll blast a hole in each of you big enough to drive a rocket-car through. Understand?"

They nodded slowly, but their eyes were dangerous and we all knew they wouldn't wait a second longer than they had to. Behind them, more and more men were joining the semi-circle enclosure and the lights were going on.

The door opened suddenly under the impetus of a kick from my captor. I went through it instantly. He followed, shut it behind him immediately and none too soon. The full weight of fifty men collided against it noisily. But it held.

"All right, down this metal ladder, quick!"

I looked down the length of fire escape leading to the alley behind the theater and started with no further delay. Behind me he came, jumping the same three and four steps I did at a time. We reached the ground in half a minute.

I stood waiting as he dropped to the ground beside me. He looked upward for an instant, then satisfied that pursuit was getting nowhere, pocketed his weapon and urged me out into the street.

Some distance down the block, parked about fifty feet from the theater marquee was a small roadster. He pushed me unceremoniously against the door, curiously avoiding touching me with his hands.

"Open it!"

I bent over, stumbled accidentally and reached involuntarily for his hand. He backed away rapidly.

"No, no, don't touch me!" he cried, suddenly oblivious to the presence of others on the sidewalk and seemed to shrink away. Then there was a flash of the weapon again and I wasted no time. I got in and closed the door. He ran around the car, opened the driver's door and slipped behind the wheel. Keeping me covered with the weapon, he switched on the ignition, shifted the gears clumsily with his free hand and finally started the motor. Slowly the car began moving out into the street.

As we passed the brightly lit theater entrance I got my first good look at his face. Up to that time I had been too busy being surprised to be much interested in precisely what he looked like. Immediately I got my second terrific shock of the evening.

**H**E was bleeding a bluish blood from a small scratch on his nose.

I gave him no trouble from then on until the end of our journey. I am a quiet sort of man with a medium sized family to provide for and my kids love their Dad. Anyway, I had a strange premonition that I was going to get out of this alive.

Sometimes a scheme can succeed too well!

As the car moved through the streets I cast occasional side glimpses at his face. His eyes were intently on the road ahead and he seemed to be taking absolutely no interest in what was going on around him. I noticed in his driving a peculiar redundancy as though the way were unfamiliar. Several times he went around a block three times and retraced his tracks down the main boulevard twice. I stood about as much of the silence as I could.

"Why the hell did you have to grab me?" I asked finally, in a slightly irritated voice.

He did not answer for awhile and I had decided that silence was enjoined when suddenly he spoke up.

"My escape must be safe from pursuit," he said in a very soft voice, "I figured that nobody would harm me if I threatened to harm you."

I laughed harshly.

"What makes you think those babies would spare my life," I asked, "if they could get yours? You've bumped a guy off, son! That semi-circle of doom were mostly his personal friends. I'm just a neighborhood ward-heeler."

He took his attention away from the road long enough to look at me with a pained expression in his eyes.

"You mean they would kill you without compunction just to get me? Why? In my own case, this murder was necessary, justified. You are innocent. Certainly. . . ."

Things were settling down chummily. I stopped being timid about casting my glances.

"This ain't heaven, buddy. We live in a hard world. Your life isn't worth the ghost of a worn-out dime today. You know how it is."

He chuckled, thinly.

"No, I'm afraid I don't know how it is. You see, I come from a different time. . . ."

Then abruptly he shut up and from that moment until we got to where we were going a clam would have been more explicit.

After a long time, mostly spent circling the city, we headed for the north suburbs and finally wound up in front of an old-fashioned frame house on a heavily tree-lined street in a very old section of the city.

"Get out," his voice was still gentle and it was still firm.

On the way up the path to the door I again bumped against him.

"Please!" his words were rapid, anxious, "do not touch me."

At the door, still edging away from my side as much as possible, he fumbled for the key, found it, inserted it into the lock and after some moments of futile working it back and forth, pushed the door open.

He didn't bother to light any lights when we got in, just ordered me on toward a flight of stairs looming in the background. I sniffed slightly, detecting a faint odor of closeness as though the house had been long untenanted and moved on.

In an upstairs bedroom, he switched on the lights, went rapidly to the window, pulled down the shade and faced me.

"Sit down . . . there," he commanded, indicating the bed. As I did so, he glanced toward the mirror of a dilapidated dressing table and surveyed his face for an instant. His eyes went wide as he noticed the blood—or whatever it was.

"No telling now what ancient diseases I'll carry back with me."

He stood silently regarding me for a moment, a strange baffled look in his eyes.

I leaned back on my elbows, sinking them deeply into the soft bed.

"This your hideout?" I asked, chattily, convinced at last by the nature of things that the guy was a nut and probably harmless for the present.

**H**E ignored my question, divested himself quickly of his jacket, threw his hat on the floor and then walked to a large object squatting in one corner, completely covered with an old blanket. I took it to be a trunk, but when he threw aside the covering, I had to whistle.

It was a machine, very much in appearance like the cradle and superstructure of the seats on the parachute jump at Coney Island. A lot of the parts were highly polished metal and glass. Others gleamed with the dull finish of opaque plastic. Everything pointed to some highly developed technology. On the base of the machine was a factory mark inscribed on a regulation brass plate. My machinist's soul exulted for the moment in the slick shininess of the whole contraption.

Another shock was due.

Still holding his gun trained on me, he stripped himself of his other clothes. Approaching bed-rock, he was suddenly disclosed to be wearing a tightly fitting suit of some metallic cloth the cut of which re-

sembled in appearance a suit of old fashioned red-flannel, even to the color of the metal.

Still paying no attention to my obvious amazement, he dabbled daintily at his injured face with an ordinary handkerchief and wiped away the ghastly colored stuff that was oozing from the cut.

I never moved a muscle, just lay quietly, partially propped up against the brass bedstead and watched him. After awhile he stopped his medical treatment, turned his eyes full on me and put the gun away in a broad metal belt which encircled his middle.

"I am going to need your help," he announced and watched my face closely.

I blinked my eyes.

"That's OK with me, mister. Only you'll have to explain. I'm not in the habit of assisting murderers. You know, accessory to the crime and all that sort of stuff."

He regarded me with a kind of helpless look in his eye.

"I don't know what you're talking about. But I suppose I'll have to explain."

**H**E leaned against a wall wearily and started to talk.

"First, I am a visitor from another time, the year 2034, to be exact, according to the present system of reckoning. I came to your time with an end in view—murder. I have committed that deed. But I assure you it all has a purpose."

"Oh, sure," I interrupted blandly.

He looked away confusedly and I thought for a minute he was going to shut up again like a clam. But he continued.

"Have you ever been in love?" he asked.

"I am the father of four kids," I answered, "which is not precisely good evidence, but . . ."

"Never mind. Here's the story. The present year is 1943. Senator Schenken instigated a law in the year 1945 which is the basis of the most vicious tyranny ever perpetrated on the human race. He introduced in that year and had passed an act of Congress which made universal sterilization of the unfit compulsory. The enactment into law of this damnable provision marks the beginning of enslavement of the American people to a robot-like bureaucracy. Encouraged, the rabid eugenisists added more and more stipulations to the act until in my own time—2034, it is impossible to marry anyone unless both of your hereditaries are compatible and in agreement

with the formula of which the witch doctors we are forced to regard as scientific experts approve.

"I fell in love," he confessed, a guilty look in his eyes," with a Type 25T Blonde, who, eugenically speaking, according to the standards of my day, is as fit a partner for me as a jellyfish is for a duck-billed platypus. She loves me too and wants to marry me. But the experts said no, said that we were courting inevitable disaster for our children, which is a lot of what you would call bunk. There is a strong party opposed to the people in power and they are backed by what I firmly believe to be excellent scientific proof that eugenic selection is sheer hogwash, considering the fact that everybody in my world is healthy and completely free from disease." He paused and breathed deeply.

"I am an expert on tempnautical navigation—that's time-travelling to you," he continued, "and being practical and revolutionary, I had the idea that if I could effectively remove the root of this cancer which is destroying the emotional life of my time and turning us into soulless machines—the root being Senator Schenken—I would have so altered original circumstances that the despicable legislation would never have come to hold power."

"And now I have succeeded!" he cried. "The foul beast is dead and when I return to 2034 I can marry my loved one. My friend, can you understand my feelings?"

I could, vaguely. I said so, keeping a tight grip on myself because I wasn't sure whether I was in a bug-house or enjoying the effects of a badly cooked chunk of beefsteak.

"Just what do you want me to do?" I asked, uncertainly, feeling sure that I would be expected to pronounce benediction on his soul.

He looked at me gratefully, a new hope springing from his eyes.

"Then you do understand! And you will help!" he gestured toward the machine. "I cannot return to the future unless some outside agency operates a control—that one," he stated, pointing to a long lever jutting out from underneath the base of the thing, "while I handle the main controls. My friend, will you do this for me?"

Well, why not, I asked myself and nodded. If he was really what he said he was, I could forget the whole business because the perpetrator of my troubles would no longer exist. If he was really a nut, I

depended on my own courage and coolness to get me out of a trying situation.

I nodded.

"Sure, but, first, please explain why you bleed blue. I'm as curious as hell. As a matter of fact I don't know why I didn't ask you before."

"Oh, that's just the Thorenson units," he replied and moved over to the machine.

Seating himself in a gorgeously upholstered cradle, he adjusted some dials and levers, then beckoned to me. I got closer.

"When I turn on the power, push that long lever toward your left. Your left, remember, not mine. And—goodbye."

**H**E must have thrown in the master switch then, because the machine suddenly became enveloped in a greenish mist. I gingerly kicked over the long rod as he had directed, being careful not to let the radiation touch me and stepped back.

It took him about thirty seconds to vanish and he did a good job of it, machine and all.

It took me several days to establish a decent alibi. I finally convinced the police that the culprit had abandoned me after using me for a shield and driven away toward the north. As the latter part of the statement was true, I gradually became morally enough sure that the whole story I gave was right that I began to believe it myself.

Now, observing the facts from the viewpoint of a year later, I can only say that the joke's on someone.

Schenken didn't die. While in the hospital, a blond nurse got him interested in eugenics, brought him books to read. He left the hospital, a man with an axe to grind.

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# STROKE

JOHN L.  
by CHAPMAN

IT WAS a corpse, a shapeless mass huddled on the warm Tahitian sand. It lay a few feet off shore, black and shriveled, untouched by swells.

I ran to it, knelt, and took a brief glance. There was little doubt. Several days—perhaps a week it had lain there. I was a doctor and knew death when I saw it.

The body bore no external marks. The cold, discolored face was sunken, unrecognizable. Death, from all appearances, had resulted from drowning.

Rising, I looked both ways along the beach. Back of me was the lazy curve of the shore line, my footprints, and in the distance the village. Before me was a lagoon, beyond it an arching cliff. But to the right, nestled in a thick foliage past the sand was a shack, charred and broken.

I stared at it, trying to assemble my thoughts. A body washed upon the shore, for days lying unnoticed on the dry, sun-beaten sand. And the cabin—it was inhabited, for as I watched the crude wooden door opened and a man emerged. He saw me and stood still, watching.

I looked down at the huddled form again, then turned for the shack. But I saw something in the sand and stopped short. It was a faint, misshapen scrawl, etched on the beach a few inches from the head of the corpse, and it said simply: Don't go.

A message. Whether or not it was complete I couldn't tell. Nor had I any notion of what it might mean. But it was there in the sand, and it said, "don't go."

Perplexed, I moved on up the beach to the shack. I was watched carefully by a tall, thin personage, white, shabbily dressed, and a little hawk-nosed.

He put his hands in his pockets and said: "You're from the village?"

I nodded. "I'm its one and only physician. I was strolling and came upon that corpse. Haven't you noticed it?"

"No. A corpse, eh?"

"You live here?"

He nodded.

"Don't you ever come out?"

"For air—yes." He breathed deeply and glanced at the sky. "May rain tonight." He turned his back and started for the door.

"Look," I said, following him, "there's been a body out there for almost a week and

you haven't paid any attention to it. Doesn't that—"

"Had I known it was a corpse," he said drowsily, "I wouldn't have gone near it. That's something that weakens me."

I STARTED to say something, but the words didn't come out. I was in the cabin doorway, my gaze frozen on a strange mechanism that all but filled the shack's interior. Such an affair as I had never seen before. Actually, it was indescribable, a twisted, perplexing heap of machinery.

"What's that?" I gasped, "an invention?"

The tall fellow turned and faced me. "In a way."

"But—if it isn't an invention—what is it?"

"A machine."

For a moment I was lost in bewilderment. "Who are you?" I asked, "and what is this—this apparatus? What does it do?"

The other rolled a cigarette slowly, and lit it. Then he said: "I'm August Wharton—a scientist, so to speak. This is my work—my life devotion. It's a machine."

"I know—obviously it's a machine. But what's it for?"

He smiled. "I don't know yet. If it does what I think it will, its purpose could be for many things."

I stepped closer, trying to make sense out of the affair. But the thing wasn't to be understood by a doctor. To me, it was like a new language.

"Tabiti," I muttered, "is a funny place for this sort of thing. How long have you been—"

"Seven months. I'm finished now. Only a few experiments remain."

I stood there awhile, completely amazed.

Suddenly I remembered the corpse on the beach, and a few duties to perform. I hurried out, promising to return.

Natives rowed the body upshore to the village. Forbes, an assistant of mine, provided transportation to my quarters, where we awaited the arrival of authorities.

I told Forbes the story, and included Wharton.

"The name is familiar," he mused. "I believe the natives mentioned him not so long ago. Someone discovered the cabin and

made an investigation. There was talk of this—machine."

"I can't understand it," I said. "It's the strangest affair I've ever seen—yet it must have some purpose. Wharton seems to know what he's doing, but doesn't care to discuss it. And the dead man—Wharton completely avoided him."

"Shut-ins get that way," said Forbes, "especially in Tahiti."

"Possibly. But I'm not satisfied with things. I'm going back. Care to come along?"

"No. I want to be in on the autopsy."

"That's an idea. Keep your eyes open."

**T**HE SUN had disappeared behind clouds, veiling the shack and the winding shore line in a gray gloom. A swell formed and lapped across the beach, seeping into the damp sand a few feet from where I stood.

I was looking down at the dim outline left by the corpse, and the simple, meaningless "don't go". I wondered for a moment about the message—and the machine.

Then I turned and hurried to the cabin and flung the door back. I all but tripped in my amazement.

The shack was bare—the machine was gone and Wharton apparently had gone with it. All that remained was a battered chair, a desk, and a notebook.

Shaking a little, I took the notebook outside, knelt on the sand and began turning the dusty, half-torn pages. Here, perhaps, was the answer, or a clue.

I came upon a penciled script, and read at random:

"April 9. Framework completed. Must stop to await arrival of last shipment from Hawaii. Progress normal." I turned a page.

"May 12. Storm receding. Progress slowed in view of exterior work necessary on cabin."

"May 21. Visitors last night. Natives, perhaps, whose curiosity overcame them. No harm to the apparatus, though future precaution may be of value."

Another page.

"June 4. Final touches completed. Had another visitor—a white man—first to see the machine. In a few moments I shall experiment, before he returns. He discovered a corpse on the beach, and when he left I investigated.

There was a strange scrawling in the sand which I did not understand. However, it is none of my concern . . ."

Running footsteps interrupted me. I looked up, and Forbes, puffing and wild-eyed, came to a halt.

"The queerest," he panted, "case we've seen. At the autopsy—they took fingerprints—the corpse is Wharton!"

"Wharton! But I saw him in the cabin—at the same time!"

"I know—but the prints don't lie—the fellow is Wharton!"

"That's crazy," I growled. "One man can't be in two places—" I paused, remembering the script. "Wait. There's more to this diary."

We read Wharton's last entry:

"Everything is in good order. My only danger lies in the rotation of the earth. If my theories are wrong, I may land in the ocean. If not, I will be transported safely seven days into the past . . ."

The same thought came to both of us. A time traveller!

**S**UDDENLY it was clear. Wharton had left for the past, had landed in the ocean, and had swum ashore. The corpse—had it been recognizable—

I sat there in a stupor, unable to move. "That's it," I managed at length, "Wharton became the corpse after his time journey. You see, Forbes—the cabin is empty." I handed him the diary, and he read the last page.

Then he stood there a moment, thinking. "My God!" he exclaimed. "I see it all now. The message in the sand. He was going to warn himself, but he didn't finish—don't you see?"

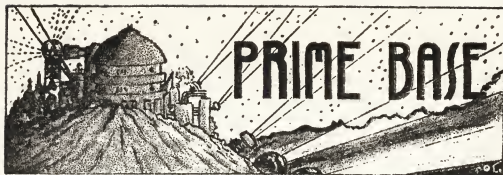
"What are you babbling about?" I demanded.

"Look—the diary says Wharton saw the message before he left. So, when he swam ashore and fell exhausted on the beach, he began writing, but stopped because he remembered seeing the message before. It fits perfectly—"

"What fits? What do you mean?"

"That's right, I didn't tell you. Wharton's death wasn't caused by drowning or exhaustion. It was caused by the fact that after he had scrawled two words in the sand, he remembered that the message had ended there, and that he was going to become the corpse. The autopsy explains that. He died of heart attack."

THE END



**T**HE LETTERS and comments on the Spring *Quarterly* have shown beyond shadow of doubt the strong hold that Ray Cummings' splendid novel *The Shadow Girl* still has upon the affections and imaginations of science fiction lovers. Not one adverse comment upon this tale has been received, thus giving it the rare 1.00 rating—truly a classic.

For the sake of elucidation, here's how we rate stories on our sheet: there were six stories in the Spring issue. Rating thus ran from one to six; one being the highest and six the lowest. With *The Shadow Girl* the checkup was simple. An uninterrupted series of 1 ratings, gives it that designation. Had there been votes placing it lower than first place, then we would have added up the score and divided by the number of votes cast for its final standing.

In second place, with 2.6 was *Einstein's Planetoid* by Paul Dennis Lavond, and, close behind, with 2.8, came Cecil Corwin's *Crisis*. *Gangway for Homer and Saknarth* tied for fourth place, while John Hollis Mason's *Mission* came in last. Not because the story was unappreciated, for the comments were nearly all favorable, but that the other tales were liked better.

The cover, Bok's interior for *Crisis*, Con-  
 aught's full-page drawing, and Forte's elegant pic for *Gangway for Homer* all were highly praised, the three interiors virtually tied in your esteem. For those of you who asked about Dolgov—we hope to have him back in the future.

**A**ND SPEAKING of Future, a word about the current (June) issue of that publication would not be amiss here. The cover is by Forte, illustrating Bob Tucker's *Princess of Detroit*, a story you won't want to miss. We're also featuring a short-short tale by a man familiar to all lovers of sci-

ence fiction: Hugo Gernsback. This being the 16th year of magazine science-fiction's existence, we decided it was time to pay tribute to the gentleman who can rightly be called its father.

You'll find a novelet of Atlantis, title is *Invisible Continent*, by Russell Blaiklock, in this issue, along with Millard Verne Gordon's *World in Balance* (illustrated by Paul!); Hugh Raymond's *The Real McCoy*, an hilarious tale; Fred Kummer's wacky little yarn, *The Spring Machine*; *The Solar Comedy*, by James Blish, and *A Message for Jean* by Wilfred Owen Morley.

And by no means least, there's a cash prize contest in this issue. Here's a chance for you to help yourself by helping us. See the issue for details. It's on sale now, and, if your dealer is sold out, copies can be obtained by writing to *Future Combined with Science Fiction*, 60 Hudson Street, New York City, and enclosing 15 cents in stamps or coin. (A year's subscription would guarantee your early receipt of all issues, we might add.)

Since we started giving personal information on contributors, the requests for some notes on ye ed himself have been too numerous to mention. (If there be any doubting Thomases in the audience, we have them both on file.)

Consulting his selective service registration card, ye ed finds that he is approximately 5 feet 11, has blue eyes, brown hair, a light complexion, heavy build, and weighs in the neighborhood of 160 pounds whenever he can get interested enough in some gal to take off the perennial extra poundage he totes around.

We started reading science fiction at a tender age and are now credited with being a virtual walking set of statistics on stories, authors, and artwork for the past fifteen years of all-stf magazines. (Of course, we're



not quite as wonderful as the fans seem to think, but its nice having the reputation, anyway.)

Our likes, outside of the field, include a fanatical devotion to the music of Jan Sibelius, Rachmaninoff, Stravinsky, Wagner and Debussy; we've written reams of poetry, most of which even so egotistical a person as ourself thought bad; we're known for our fantastic cooking, general absent-mindedness, and the ability to go to sleep anywhere.

Inside the field, we're extremely fond of the stories and artwork of Hannes Bok, as well as the drawings of Dolgov, Forte, and Eliot Dold. Among our favorite of the oldtime authors are John Taine, A. Merritt, David H. Keller, H. P. Lovecraft, and W. Olaf Stapledon, while we think very highly of such newcomers as Martin Pearson, Hugh Raymond, Cecil Corwin, Paul Dennis Lavond, and Joe Gilbert. We get a big kick out of editing *Science Fiction Quarterly* and *Future*, and hope to keep on improving both books so long as we're around to work on them.

Oh yes, and we just love to see letters from readers, whether the comments are kisses or kicks. (Question: Could that be taken as a hint to those who haven't written in? Answer: It could.)

**H**UGH Raymond writes: "A word of thanks to Mr. Stoy for his appreciative remarks anent *The Year of Uniting*. (Winter Quarterly, issue number 5; copies still available at our office. ed.)

"When I first conceived the story, I had the Technocrats in mind as the prototypes of the 'science government'. I have long been acquainted with this movement, its theory and ideology, and think I know as much about it as anyone, excluding the High Priest of the Spark Gap, Howard Scott himself.

"For certain reasons, chiefly lack of space, I was unable to give what, to myself, would have been a completely faithful picture of life under a Technate. The point I sought to bring out in *Year of Uniting*, however, was its essential icy coldness toward culture and the more human things of life. In the story, I gave the science government credit for being able to provide enough essential consumers' products to satisfy the needs of the population. Actually, should Technocracy, or any other movement even remotely like it, take power, I believe that

the conditions resulting from its operation would be a thousand times more horrible than those depicted in my story.

"In the line of the movement's program, and the similarity to developments depicted in the tale, a recent advertisement appearing in nearly all the large newspapers, speaks for itself. Close examination of the movement has convinced me of its essentially fascist character, a character which the Technocrats themselves would be the last to deny—although they deny vigorously being anything in the way of fascists, of course. Fascism, in any form whatsoever, has not and cannot maintain a decent standard of living for any nation and tends invariably to throw those under its sway on the path of retrogression. Being essentially anti-democratic (Howard Scott has referred publicly to democracy in unprintable terms) Technocracy, or a science government, could not, I believe, possibly represent the wishes of the majority, or cater to the desires of any but a very tiny minority class of 'experts' who have appointed themselves the arbiters of American destinies.

"Mr. Stoy's pessimism regarding a World confederation of nations is easily understandable, considering the starkly chaotic state of world affairs at the present time. This condition is mainly due, of course, to a lack of democracy amongst the peoples of the world. Once achieving democracy, however, I doubt that the nations would take even the fifteen years I allowed them in *The Year of Uniting*, but would put this planet on the path to comparative paradise in somewhat nearer five.

"We are fighting, at the present time, a world wide war of universal democracy and the right of the majority to decide how they shall live. The will to make this world we know a better (not perfect, mind you, but better) world already exists in the peoples of our planet. The various leaders and war chiefs have found it impossible to make their subjects fight without promising them this end. Even Hitler, after nearly ten years of supreme power, has constantly found it necessary to promise the Germans a better world for all when spurring them on to greater sacrifices and new conquests. All that lacks now is victory for the democracies and come hell or high water, come what may, victory shall belong to the peoples of the world.

"And with that victory will come the truly scientific future—the only future worthy of the human race."

**W**E'VE received a large number of fan magazines recently, and, while space does not permit detailed reviews, wish to thank all those who sent them, and mention a few which struck us as being particularly worth investigation. (The proper way to investigate a fan magazine, is to send its editor the requisite sum for one copy—unless you wish to indulge in prolonged investigation via subscription.)

*Sunspots*, edited by Gerry de la Ree and Rod Gaetz, 31 Bogert Place, Westwood, New Jersey, is a neatly printed magazine, appearing bi-monthly. The price is 10c, and the current issue contains excellent articles by Jack Williamson, Malcolm Jameson, and many others. *Le Zombie*, the perennial favorite, edited by Bob Tucker, sells for 5c the copy, and is really indescribable. You'll not regret having chanced a nickel for it—it's virtually an institution in the fantasy fiction field. The address is Box 260, Bloomington, Ill. *Fantasy Fiction Field*

*Newsweek* is invaluable to the follower and collector of fantasy and science fiction. It's now legal sized, neatly mimeographed. 5c the copy; 8 issues for 25c. The publisher, Julius Unger, who resides at 1702 Dahill Road, Brooklyn, New York, is offering a month's subscription free to newcomers—all that's required is that you send four 1½c stamps to cover postage. *Spaceways*, published by Harry Warner, Jr., 303 Bryan Place, Hagerstown, Maryland, is regarded by and large as the No. 1 fanzine. Sells for 10c the copy or three for 25c and appears, roughly, every six weeks. It's been going now since 1938, and is well worth your while.

That's all for now. In our next issue, we'll be presenting Ray Cummings' well-known novel, *Brigands of the Moon*, by your request, and there'll be a lineup of first class new tales as well. Until then, here's to victory, your health, and happy reading. R. W. Lowndes.

## IN OUR NEXT ISSUE --

"Do you understand now why we should be suspicious of this George Prince? He has a criminal record—and a thorough technical knowledge of radium ores. He associates with Martians of bad reputation.

"And a large Martian company has recently developed a radium engine to compete with our Earth motor. You know that? You know that there is very little radium available on Mars, and our government will not allow our own radium supply to be exported. That Martians company needs radium—it will do anything to get it. What do you suppose it would pay for a few tons of really rich radioactive ore—such as Grantline found on the Moon?"

"But," I objected, "that is a reputable Martian company—backed by the government of the Martian Union. Mars would not dare—"

"Of course not!" Captain Carter exclaimed sardonically. "Not openly! But if Martian brigands had a supply of radium—I don't imagine where it came from would make much difference. That Martian company would buy it."

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Don't suffer embarrassment and discomfort caused by loose dental plates. Apply **CROWN RELINER**. In a jiffy your plate fits like new and stays that way up to 4 months. No old-fashioned heating to burn your mouth. Just squeeze **CROWN** from tube and put your teeth back in. They'll fit as snugly as ever. Inventor is a recognized authority in dental field. A patent has been applied for **CROWN RELINER** to protect you from imitators. After you reline your plate with **CROWN**, take your false teeth out for cleaning without affecting the **CROWN RELINER**. **CROWN RELINER** is guaranteed . . . it's harmless.

### READ WHAT A USER WRITES

J. Clements of Algonac writes: "My plates were so bad they rattled when I talked." "Now I can eat steaks, corn on the cob." E. W. W. of Virginia writes—"I have found Crown Reliner all you claim for it and more."—Many more attest to same excellent results. Reline your plates with **CROWN**. It's tasteless. Has that natural pink color. Order a tube of **CROWN RELINER** today . . . enough to last a year. We include **FREE** a tube of **CROWN** plate cleaner.

### NOT A POWDER or PASTE!

Crown Dental Plate Reliner is not a powder or a paste. It is a scientific discovery that you can use without fuss or bother. Just squeeze it out of the tube onto the plate and in a jiffy your plate will again feel as tight and comfortable as it did when it was new . . . feels comfortable too! Doesn't burn or irritate. Order today and enjoy this new oral comfort right away.

### SEND NO MONEY

You take no risk when you order Crown Plate Reliner. You must be one hundred per cent delighted or no cost. Try it for four months and then return it for a full refund if not satisfied. Order at once and we'll include free with your order a tube of Crown's Dental Plate Cleaner. You'll be delighted with both and the Crown Cleaner will always make your mouth feel clean and refreshed. Rush coupon sending name and address. Pay postman one dollar for combination plus postage, or send cash and we pay postage. Act now and enjoy this new happiness.

No.1  
CLEAN  
WELL

No.2  
DRY WELL  
UNDER BULB

No.3  
SQUEEZE CROWN  
RELINER FROM  
TUBE, SPREAD  
EVENLY, PUT PLATE  
BACK IN MOUTH

**RUSH COUPON** Send No Money



Order this  this FREE



**CROWN PLASTIC CO., Dept. 3407,**  
4358 W. Philadelphia Ave., Detroit, Mich.  
Send your wonderful Crown Dental Plate Reliner  
and include the free Crown Dental Cleaner. I  
will pay postman one dollar plus postage on  
arrival. If I am not satisfied after four months  
I may return partly used tube for full refund.  
(☐) I am inclosing one dollar in full payment  
same guarantee.)

Name .....

Address .....